

III.

Analysis Necessary.

“Let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation.” —*Heb. vi. 1.*

213

To systematize the work of the Holy Spirit in individuals, we must first consider their spiritual condition *before* conversion.

Misunderstanding concerning this leads to error and confusion. It causes the various operations of the Holy Spirit to be confounded, so that the same terms are used to designate different things. And this confuses one's own thought, and leads others astray. This is most seriously apparent in ministers who discuss this subject in general terms, artlessly avoid definiteness, and consequently reiterate the same platitudes.

Such preaching makes little or no impression; its monotone is wearisome; it accustoms the ear to repetitions; it lacks stimulus for the inward ear. And the mind, which can not remain inactive with impunity, seeks relief in its own way, often in unbelief, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. The words “heart,” “mind,” “soul,” “conscience,” “inward man” are used indiscriminately. There are *frequent* calls for conversion, regeneration, renewing of life, justification, sanctification, and redemption; while the ear has not been accustomed to understand in each of these a special thing and a peculiar revelation of the work of the Holy Spirit. And in the end this chaotic preaching makes it impossible to discuss divine things intelligently, since one initiated and more thoroughly instructed can not be understood.

We solemnly protest especially against the pious appearance that conceals the inward hollowness of this preaching by saying! “My simple Gospel has no room for these hair-splitting distinctions; they savor of the dry scholasticism with which quibbling minds terrify God's dear children, and bring them under the bondage of the letter. Nay, the Gospel of my Lord must remain to me full of life and spirit: therefore spare me these subtleties.”

And no doubt there is some truth in this. By a dry analysis of soul-refreshing truth, abstract minds often rob simple souls of much comfort and joy. They discuss spiritual things in the mongrel terms of Anglicized Latin, as tho souls could have no part with Christ unless they be experts in the use of these bastard words. Such terrifying of the weak betrays pride and self-exaltation. And a very foolish pride it is, for the boasted knowledge is readily acquired by mere effort of the memory. Such externalizing of the Christian faith is offensive. It substitutes glibness of tongue for genuine piety, and mental justification for that of faith. Thus piety of the heart moves to the head, and instead of the Lord Jesus Christ, Aristotle, the master teacher of dialectics, becomes the savior of souls.

214

To plead for such a caricature is far from our purpose. We believe that our salvation depends solely upon God's work in us, and not upon our testimony; and the little child with stammering lips, but wrought upon by the Holy Spirit, will precede these vain scribes into

the Kingdom of Heaven. Let no one dare impose the yoke of his own thoughts upon others. Christ's yoke alone *fits* the souls of men.

And yet the Gospel does not condone shallowness, neither does it approve mere twaddle.

Of course there is a difference. We do not require our children to know the names of all the nerves and muscles of the human body, of the diseases to which it is subject, and of the contents of the pharmacopœia. It would be a burden to the little fellows, who are happiest so long as they are unconscious of the curious organism they carry with them. But the physician who is not quite certain as to the locality of these vital organs; who, careless of details, is satisfied with the generalities of his profession; who, unable to diagnose the case correctly, fails to administer the proper remedies, is promptly dismissed and a more discriminating one is called in. And to some extent the same is required of all intelligent people. Well-informed men should not be ignorant of the vital organs of the human body and their principal functions; mothers and nurses should be still better informed.

The same applies to the life of the Church. The least gifted among the brethren can not understand the distinctions of the spiritual life; unable to bear strong meat, they should be fed with milk alone. Neither should young children be wearied and blunted with phrases far above their comprehension. Both should be taught according to "*the tenor of their way.*" A child talking on religious matters in discriminating terms unpleasantly affects the spiritual feeling. But not so the spiritual *physician, i.e., the minister of the Word.* If the unskilled veterinarian be dismissed, how much more they who, pretending to treat and cure souls, betray their own ignorance of the conditions and activities of the spiritual life. Wherefore we insist that every minister of the Word be a specialist in this spiritual anatomy and physiology; familiar with the various forms of spiritual disease, and always able out of Christ's fulness to select the spiritual remedies required.

And the same knowledge we claim, if not in the same degree, of every intelligent man or woman. The physician or lawyer who smiles at our ignorance of the first principles of his profession ought to be equally ashamed when betraying his own lamentable ignorance of the condition of his soul. In the spiritual life each talent should bear interest. Every man ought to be symmetrically developed. According to his range of vision, strength of powers, and depth of penetration, he should be able to distinguish spiritual things and his own soul's need. And that this knowledge is largely found only among our plain, God-fearing people, and not among the higher classes, is a serious and deplorable sign of the times.

The knowledge which is power in the spiritual sphere, and able to heal, does not come in foreign terms, does not exhaust itself in the various criticism of Scripture, fond only of philosophic reasonings, starving souls by giving them stones for bread; but it searches the Word and work of God in the souls of men systematically, and proves that a man has *studied* the things in which he is to minister to the Church.



Our spiritual leaders, therefore, who at the university and in the catechetical class have replaced this spiritual knowledge by various criticism and apologetics, have much to answer for. For the last thirty years this knowledge has been neglected in both these institutions. And so knowledge was lost, the preaching became monotonous, and a great part of the Church perished. There was still eye and ear for the objective work of the Son, but the work of the Holy Spirit is slighted and neglected. Consequently spiritual life has sunk to such a degree that, while scarcely one third of the fulness of grace which is in Christ Jesus is being known and honored, men dare to assert that they preach Christ and Him crucified.

Hence the discussion of the Holy Spirit's work in individuals demands that, while risking the danger of being called "scholastic drivers," we leave the paths of shallowness and generalities and proceed to careful analysis. The Holy Spirit's operations upon the various parts of our being in their several conditions must be distinguished and treated separately; not only in the elect, but also in the non-elect, for they are not the same. It is true the Scripture teaches that God causes His sun to shine upon the good and the evil, and His rain to come down upon the just and the unjust, so that in nature every good gift coming down from the Father of lights is common to all; but in the kingdom of grace this is not so. The Sun of righteousness often shines upon one, leaving another in darkness; and the drops of grace often water one soul, while others remain utterly deprived of them.

Hence, altho the Spirit's work in the elect is of primary importance, yet it does not exhaust His work in individuals. Christ was set also for a fall to many in Israel; and even this is wrought by the witness of the Holy Spirit. Not only the savor of life, but the savor of death also reaches the soul by Him; as the apostle declares regarding those who, having received the gift of the Holy Ghost, had fallen away. His activity in them, and their condition when He begins His saving or hardening operations, must be carefully noticed.

Of course, this is not the place to discuss the condition of fallen man exhaustively. This would require special inquiry. Many things which perhaps elsewhere will be explained more in detail can here receive but passing notice. But it will serve our purpose if we succeed in giving the reader such a clear view of the sinner's condition that he can understand us when we discuss the Holy Spirit's work upon the sinner.

By a sinner we understand man as he is, lives, and moves by nature, *i.e.*, without grace. And in that state he is dead in trespasses and sin; alienated from the life of God; wholly deprived and without strength; a sinner, and therefore guilty and condemned. And not only dead, but lying in the midst of death, ever sinking more deeply into death, which if not checked in its course opens underneath ever more widely, until eternal death stands revealed.



This is the fundamental thought, the mother-idea, the principal conception, of his state. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men.” (Rom. v. 12) And “the wages of sin is death.” (Rom. vi. 23) “Sin being finished bringeth forth death.” (James i. 15) To be translated into another state, one must pass from death into life.

But this general idea of death must be analyzed in its several relations, and to this end it must be determined what man was before, and what he has become after, this spiritual death.



IV.

Image and Likeness.

“Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.” —*Gen. i. 26.*

218

Glorious is the divine utterance that introduces the origin and creation of man: “And God created man after His own image and after His own likeness; after the image of God created He him” (Dutch translation).

The significance of these important words was recently discussed by the well-known professor, Dr. Edward Böhl, of Vienna. According to him it should read: Man is created “*in*”, not “*after*” God’s image, *i.e.*, the image is not found in man’s *nature* or *being*, but outside of him in *God*. Man was merely *set* in the *radiance* of that image. Hence, remaining in its light, he would live in that image. But stepping out of it, he would fall and retain but his own nature, which before and after the fall is the same.¹

In the discussion of the corruption of the human nature we will consider this opinion of the highly esteemed professor of Vienna. Let us state here simply that we reject this opinion, in which we see a return to Rome’s errors. Dr. Böhl’s negative character of sin, which is the basis of this representation, we can not entertain. Moreover, it opposes the doctrine of the Incarnation, and of Sanctification as held by the Reformed Church. Hence we believe it to be safest, first to explain the confession of the fathers concerning this, and then to show that this representation is inconsistent with the Word.

Accepting the account of Creation as the Holy Spirit’s direct revelation, we acknowledge its absolute credibility in every part. They who do not so accept it, or who, like many Ethical theologians, deny the literal interpretation, can have no voice in the discussion. If in the exposition of the account we are in earnest, and do not trifle with words, we must be thoroughly convinced that God actually said: “Let Us make men after Our image and after Our likeness.” (*Gen. i. 26*) But denying this and holding that these words merely represent the form in which somebody, animated by the Holy Spirit, presented man’s creation to himself, we can deduce nothing from them. Then we have no security that they are divine; we know only that a pious man *attributed* these thoughts to God and laid them upon His lips while they were but his own account of man’s creation:

219

Hence the infallibility of Sacred Scripture is our starting-point. We see in *Gen. i. 27* a direct testimony of the Holy Spirit; and with fullest assurance we believe that these are the

1 In the Dutch the preposition “in” has not the meaning of “conformably to,” as in the English, but denotes rest or motion within limits, whether of place, time, or circumstances. With nouns or adjectives the word governed by “in” indicates the sphere, the domain where a property manifests itself. Hence the Dutch expression, “Geschapen *in* het, beeld God’s” (created in the divine image), indicates the sphere in which Adam moved before he fell.—Trans.