

UP FROM SIN

The Fall and Rise of a Prodigal
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by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

RELIGION – WHAT AND HOW

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

Many of us remember the evening of the last day of August, 1885, when that peculiar sensation crept over the earth, which resembled the quiver of an electric shock. It seemed that in the bowels of the earth Nature had turned loose her batteries and sent quivering all over the earth her destructive fluid. I shall never forget that sensation. I shall never forget that peculiar rattle of the window. I shall never forget that strange noise, which sounded like the distant roaring of thunder.

What a change it caused in the circles of life! Strong men who had never prayed before were heard screaming in prayer. Thoughtless women who had never dwelt upon the serious side of life were caused to weep.

This was such a scene as that which occurred in the Philippian prison the night when the solemn and weighty words of our Scripture were submitted. Let us notice the reason for which Paul and Silas were put in prison.

They preached a doctrine which was antagonistic to prevailing manners and customs.

I expect people called them sensationalists. One thing is sure – if Paul had lived in this century, he would have been branded as a genuine sensationalist. I doubt whether he would have stayed out of prison as long as he did. Some court would have granted a libel against him.

And as to Christ, He would have been made to serve a term in prison long before those Jews got Him. But Christ was not afraid of the prison; neither was Paul, and thank God there are men today who are not afraid of the dungeon. God help us to follow Christ in our preaching as well as in other matters.

They thought the imprisonment of Paul and Silas would stop the progress of God’s truth. Oh, how little they understood about God. How little did they understand that God was more powerful than the Roman law.

THE RESULT OF THEIR IMPRISONMENT

I shall only notice one of the results which followed – the conversion of the jailer. Observe, first, he was afraid he would be destroyed. He knew the Roman law which said that if a jailer should let a prisoner escape he should give up his own life. When he looked into the prison and saw the doors wide open, the handcuffs off their hands and their feet out of the stocks, he thought surely they would all go, and that meant death to him. But Paul called out to him not to be afraid; they were not going to leave.

Now after he was assured of that fact he was concerned about his soul. And then he asked the question:

“What must I do to be saved?”

Paul answered, **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”**

RELIGION – WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO GET IT

A great many people don't like the term “religion” we so often use. I know a preacher who says he never wants to hear it mentioned again; he says it is full of mysteries and confounds the mind. I don't think so. I think it is one of the simplest of all problems to solve.

I confess there is a fondness in me for the Old Methodist expression of “getting religion,” and for the old Baptist idea of keeping it. One seems to be as important as the other, and I think we might consolidate on the expressions.

There are two forms of religion – the true and the false. One embraces Divine grace and truth, and the other does not. Every sane mind has its god. No man can exist without a god of some kind. There must be something to worship; something to which to cling when all things else fail. The ivy can't grow alone; it must have something to which it clings. Its nature is to select an oak, but if, perchance, it can't get an oak it will grasp something else. So is man. There must be something around which he can throw the tendrils of his affections. God made man to cling to Him, but if he will not he must and will cling to something else.

RELIGION AND EDUCATION

Now religion is in part the result of education.

Not a knowledge of Greek, Latin and mathematics. I know some of the best people in the world who never heard tell of Greek and Latin and mathematics. It is not book learning, but God learning; that's what I mean by education.

Solomon showed his wisdom when he said,

“Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

Have you not observed those climbing vines in the yard? How easy it is to train them to climb upward while their branches are tender, but how hard if you should let them alone till they are grown, and their fiber is fixed and hard. You, if you neglect them, instead of climbing up those strings, they are going to spread out all over the ground and cling to wood and stone. I am not surprised at so many who wallow in the dirt and worship the things of this world when I think what poor training they have had.

I know a good mother who says she doesn't believe in making her children go to Sunday school and church, and yet I've seen the same mother spend hours at a time trying to train her honeysuckles to climb up her strings so as to furnish shade. I wonder why she does not let those vines alone till they get grown; probably then they would shape themselves. Ah, now is the time to shape them, while their branches are young and tender. And which is of most importance to train, a boy or a vine?

I know a prominent educator who says he doesn't believe in sending his children to church or to Sunday school, unless they want to go. One day, while talking to him on the subject, I asked him if he did not send his children to dancing schools to learn what some people call "grace," and he said he did. Now, I submit, which of the two graces is of more importance, ballroom, so-called grace, or Christian grace? It is strange to me how many people are so idiotic in some things and yet so smart in others.

But how shall we be saved? This was the Philippian jailer's inquiry of Paul, and is the inquiry of many today.

NOT BY CONSCIENCE

Not by the exercise of conscience. A great many today say, "Let the boy alone till he gets old enough to obey the dictates of his conscience"; as if conscience was an organ to the soul like the liver to the body. Some think the conscience is for the analysis of thought and the separation of the bad from the good.

In other words, that conscience is as the parabolic headlight on a locomotive, focusing its rays of light upon the steel rails and lighting up the engine's path. I don't believe in any such idolatry. Let us remember that the thing we call conscience is largely a creature of education, and that it may be warped by individual surroundings.

NOT REFORMATION

Not by a moral reformation. Paul did not tell the jailer to go off and change his manner of living – simply to quit his meanness and do better. There are a great many who think religion consists in external reformation. Some time ago in an inquiry meeting, I asked a young man if he wanted to be a Christian. He said he was trying to be.

"And how?" said I.

"Why," said he, "I'm trying to be better."

Young man, listen: You can't get to heaven that way. There is not a single promise in God's Word to you as long as you continue in that course.

Some time ago I visited a "zoo." I was shown a huge lion with a muzzle on. Why? Because they wanted to prevent him from killing people. He looked composed, but was not tame. He had the same old lion spirit as before. There has simply been an outward change in the lion.

There was another thing Paul didn't tell him to do. He didn't tell him to wait till the excitement was over. Some of the more conservative brethren would have said:

"You wait till all this excitement is over, and then you can get religion."

It is rather strange that people can exercise enough judgment to do almost everything in the world amid the wildest excitement. I saw the other day that while the voting was being done in Chicago shouts were so wild that they could scarcely count the results of the ballots. And yet when we come to religion it must be done in an old long-faced, monotonous manner.

BELIEVE ON CHRIST

But Paul did say, "***Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.***" That is the keynote; that's religion.

What was involved? Not simply a belief that Jesus was the Son of God, for it is said, "**The devils believe yet they tremble,**" – but belief leading to accept Christ as your Saviour. Like a poor widow woman whose rent is past due, and the landlord tells her it must be paid. She can't do it. She is about to be put out of doors, and a good friend comes up and says:

"Give yourself no concern; I will pay the debt – not only now, but for all time to come."

Believe as laying hold upon Him. A vessel is wrecked. One after another of her crew go down. There is a cabin boy thinking of his home, his mother and father, and praying, though scarce expecting to be saved, when a large plank floats past. As he sees it, he husband his strength, balances himself, makes a bold and fearless leap. He lays hold upon it. He rests his whole weight upon it, and while others perish he is saved.

That is you, man, out of Christ. Your vessel is wrecked upon the breakers of sin, and as you are in a hopeless state, with the waters of destruction rolling high around you, there passes by a plank. It comes near you, and nearer still – you lay hold upon Him! He'll bear your whole weight, and save you.

TRUST IN CHRIST

Believe as trusting. There is a boy whose father was buried yesterday. He is wearing his father's gold watch. Some robbers are trying to take it from him. He is struggling to keep it, but is about to lose it, when I come up and say:

“Give it to me, my boy; I’ll take it and keep it for you.”

For a moment he looks at me with doubtful eyes, but I say to him, “Trust me,” and he sees that I am in earnest and sincere. He hands it over to me, and I save him from being robbed.

That is what the apostle Paul says of himself. He said he had a soul, and was afraid of losing it. The devil wanted it. But Christ said, “Give it to me, I’ll keep it.”

Paul gave it to Him, and then said:

“I know whom I have believed [or trusted], and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.”

You have a soul, too. The devil is trying to get it. Christ says, “Give it to me. Son, give me thine heart.”

Trust it to Jesus and be saved. This is the religion of Christ.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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