

FULLY FURNISHED

or

THE CHRISTIAN WORKER'S EQUIPMENT

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE WORKER'S CONFESSION

ONE of the most important things to observe in our Christian life and service, is the condition attached to any blessing that we may need. "**Make this valley full of ditches**" (II Kings 3:16) was the word of the Lord, through the prophet Elisha, to the king of Israel; and after they had made the ditches, then the Lord caused the water to come and fill them. In like manner, when there is on our part, obedience to the Divine condition, there follows abundant blessing and continuous victory. True confession of sin is making, as it were, the ditches: then follows, as a consequence, the filling.

It is also most important to observe the order of Divine blessing.

- Confession of sin leads to cleansing from sin, and consecration to God follows.
- Power with God and man, is the result of purity of heart, and persistency in prayer.
- Separation to God, is a consequence of salvation from the power and love of self, and following this, comes meetness for the Master's use.

We have this illustrated in the case of Isaiah (Isaiah 6). As he viewed the holiness of God, and saw himself in the light of His presence, the vision caused him to cry out, . . . "**Woe is me! for I am undone**" (or, as "The Englishman's Bible" has it, "I am dumb;" which may mean, "I have no words to utter on my own behalf;" or, "I have been guilty of silence"), "**because I am a man of unclean lips,**" &c.

Then came the cleansing. The seraph took the coal from off the altar (the emblem of the accepted sacrifice), and placing it on the prophet's lips (the application of the sacrifice), said: "**Lo, this hath touched thy lips and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged,**" or atoned for.

Then Isaiah willingly responded to the voice which was saying, . . .

"**Who will go for us?**" "**Here am I; send me;**" and forth with he was commissioned.

Thus we see that there is - first, confession of sin; then cleansing from sin; and then consecration to the Lord for service.

We are not now considering the confession of national sins, though we should make that also, even as Nehemiah did, when he confessed, “**We have sinned against Thee: both I and my father’s house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against Thee, and have not kept the commandments**” (Nehemiah 1:6, 7); and as Daniel, when he made his confession and said, “**We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from Thy precepts and from Thy judgments**” (Daniel 9:5).

There is ample reason why we should confess our national sins, when we think, for instance, of the opium forced upon China by this country, which is blighting and blasting that land like a terrible plague; when we call to mind the drink traffic in Africa, the poison that England is importing there, which is a disgrace and a dishonour to us. And when we also remember the infidelity, intemperance, and impurity, which as a three-headed monster goes stalking through our land, there is sufficient reason to fast with Nineveh, to lament with Jeremiah, to be sad at heart with Nehemiah, and to humble ourselves with Daniel.

In considering the believer’s personal confession to God, we are not called upon to consider the failures and faults of our fellow believers, though with Paul we have had cause to lament that many who did run well, have turned out to be stony-ground hearers; and we have had our Alexanders to slander us (II Timothy 4:14), and Demases to forsake us (II Timothy 4:10).

Again, there is great cause for confession when we think of the envy, hatred, malice, worldliness, unbelief, want of love to souls, leaning towards error, neglect of prayer, and want of conformity to Christ, which we see in so many of those who profess His name.

But we are considering, as servants of the Lord, the need to humble ourselves under His mighty hand, and confess to Him our individual sins, our own peculiar failures, so that with Isaiah we may have cleansing, and go forth, in renewed power and energy, with the Lord in His service.

There are two things which lead to confession.

- (1) The examination of ourselves and our service under the microscope of God’s Word, which will help us to see the flaws and failures.
- (2) The measuring of ourselves in the light and presence of Him, who is “**a Consuming Fire.**”

This will beget a deeper apprehension of His character and claims, and our experience will be intensified in consequence; for every manifestation of Christ will wean a fresh impetus to our service, and a new experience in our souls.

Now we know that before every such revelation a deep humbling, and a specific confession of sin and unworthiness on our part is experienced.

We shall refer to several instances in Scripture, as illustrating and enforcing this statement, and shall point out the special sin or hindrance that led to the manifestation; and may the Holy Spirit bring home the truth to us!

I - Abraham, or walking before others.

“When Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect” (Genesis 17:1).

The Lord seems to say, “Be upright. No more listening to, and walking before Sarah in unbelief. Walk before Me. I am the Almighty God: I am quite able to keep to My word and fulfil My promise. It is true you are old, and Sarah is well stricken in years; but although your bodies are dead, I will do as I have pledged Myself.”

We see Abram’s mistake; but do we not often fall into the same snare, namely, that of acting before others, seeking to please men, instead of pleasing God and doing everything as under His eye, according to His truth, by His power, and for His glory?

- What scheming there is to carry on the Lord’s work!
- What efforts to be big before others!

One of the evils of to-day is, that many are adopting worldly means to carry on the Lord’s work (so-called).

- The Saturday evening concert takes the place of the prayer meeting.
- The Lord’s people, instead of praying to Him, and using their privilege and responsibility to give heartily to Him for His work, get up a bazaar, thus asking the world to patronize the Church.
- The political lecture takes the place of, or is added to, the exposition of the Word.
- And verily the line of separation between the world and the Church, is rubbed out, and believers and unbelievers are seen hand in hand.

The danger at one time was, that the Church would go down to the world, as Abram went down to Egypt; but now the evil is, that the Church is not only going down to the world, but is inviting the world into the Church, and is seeking to entertain it, instead of preaching the Gospel.

How true Dr. Bonar’s words are: “I look for the Church, and I find it in the world; and I look for the world, and find it in the Church!”

Brethren, are we not to blame for this?

- Have we been faithful to our Lord in speaking out upon these things? Or, at least, do we realize the mischief these things have wrought?
- Have we forgotten that One is our Master, even Christ, and that we are responsible to Him to abide by the directions He has given us in His Word?
- Do we fail to remember that the path of separation is the place of power and blessing?

Thank God if He has kept us from the spirit of this age! To Him be the glory! Let us not in any way judge others in a self-righteous spirit, but, remembering that there are brethren who have erred, and recognizing our oneness in Christ as members of His body, let us confess their failures and our own faults as well, for they are many.

II - *Jacob, or self-aim.*

Jacob was always looking out for himself. He cared not who suffered, so long as he succeeded.

His natural character shows itself in his parting with his mess of pottage, on condition that he got the birthright; in preparing a savory meal for his father as a fit opportunity to obtain the coveted blessing; in serving Laban so long as it meant profit to himself; and in sending a present to Esau, that he might, if possible, appease the anger his conscience told him to expect.

But the Lord meets with him, wrestles with him, and asks his name, and what Esau had said of him, **“Is he not rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright, and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing”** (Genesis 27:36), he himself confirms, and confesses that he is Jacob - the deceiver and supplanter.

Men of less cunning might afford to miss the chance of coming face to face with God. Jacob must come into close quarters with Him. Can we wonder at Jacob’s astonishment as his whole past life of self-interest comes up in review at Peniel? **“I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”**

Did he not feel that he deserved to die?

Jacob, however, discovered that his name suited him well, and that discovery paved the way for blessing.

Let us welcome the Divine scrutiny which robs us of the Jacob nature; for the spirit that actuated this man, is in us all. Oh, this horrid self! It asserts itself in our holiest moments: stalking into the pulpit, suggesting recourse to some flight of eloquence, some poetical utterance which begs for applause from men.

Nor is it wanting when we draw near to the Lord in prayer. There is such a strong tendency to pray before men, rather than plead for them.

What seeking for power, too, so that it may be seen how powerful we are, and that others, seeing the feather in our cap, may acknowledge the same to our glory! How dishonoring this is to the Lord! How grieving to the Holy Spirit! What Berridge says of pride, we say of self: “It is the first thing on in the morning, and the last thing off at night.”

III - *Moses, or looking to self instead of to God.*

When the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, He commanded him to go down to Israel in Egypt, and told him that He would use him to accomplish His purpose; then Moses began to make a whole host of excuses.

He referred to himself, and said: **“Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?”** Who, indeed, if only Moses? but the Lord met that by saying, **“Certainly I will be with thee.”** That should have been quite sufficient for him.

Then Moses borrowed misery by supposing what Israel would say : “**Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them,**” &c.; but the Lord met that by telling him, He was the I AM, who was sufficient for all.

Moses now raised another difficulty, saying that the children of Israel would not believe him, nor hearken to him; then the Lord showed him His power by turning his rod into a serpent, and by causing his hand to be covered with leprosy, and cleansing him from it, and also promised to perform like miracles through him.

Moses next pleaded that he was not an eloquent man, that he was slow of speech, and could not speak; but the Lord overcame that by giving him his brother Aaron as a spokesman (Exodus 3:and 4).

In all this, we see Moses looking to himself, instead of to the authority of God. And how often have we done the same!

Is there not one of two extremes into which we are apt to run?

Either we look to our own strength, or to our own weakness. The former causes us to be puffed up with pride, and the latter casts us down in discouragement.

When we are inflated with pride, we rob God of His glory; and when we allow our weakness to prostrate us, as Elijah did when he ran away from Jezebel and lay down under the juniper tree, we limit the Holy One of Israel by our unbelief.

Let us remember, as Hudson Taylor once said, “it is a sin to be discouraged.”

Oh, how often the Lord cannot use us because we look to our own resources! “God’s commands are His enablings,” says Ralph Erskine; that is, when the Lord bids us do anything, He gives us the power to accomplish it. There is cause for confession when we hear in mind our proneness to be influenced by our surroundings, depressed by our circumstances, and discouraged by our weakness.

IV - Joshua, or self-authority.

When Israel was before Jericho, Joshua saw a Man with a drawn sword, and exclaimed, “**Art Thou for us, or for our adversaries? And He said, “Nay; but as Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come”** (Joshua 5:13-15).

The Lord wanted Joshua to know that he was not captain of the Lord’s host, but that the Lord Himself was, and Joshua must take a second place - the servant’s place. It seemed almost as if Joshua, before this, had taken a place he had no right to; so the Lord, by manifesting Himself as Captain of the Lord’s host, made him understand that the authority was His, and that the government was to be upon His shoulder.

Have we taken the right position as servants of the Lord?

Has there been a lording it over God's heritage, as though it were ours?

Have we followed in the steps of Him who came "**not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many**"; who took the slave's position, who washed the disciples' feet, and did the bond-servant's work?

Have we fully comprehended that we are the servants of the Lord Jesus, for His Church and the world?

Have we carried out the maxim of the Lord: "**He that is chief, let him be the servant of all**?"

Has there not been rather a putting on of a superior air, a standing upon one's dignity, and a seeming to be on a higher plane? How unlike Him who was meek and lowly in heart, gentle in manner, tender in expression, humble in life, and loving in ministry!

V - Gideon, or unbelief.

With what a shower of "Oh's" and "If's" Gideon met the Lord when He appeared as the Mighty One of valor! - for undoubtedly the reading of Judges 6:12, 13: "**The Lord is with thee, even the Lord mighty in valor,**" is the correct one, and not that which makes Gideon the mighty one of valor.

But note how Gideon met Him with his vocabulary of unbelief.

There was:

- the exclamation of unbelief - "**Oh! my Lord;**"
- the uncertainty of unbelief - "**If the Lord be with us;**"
- the language of unbelief - "**Why then is all this befallen us?**"
- the consternation of unbelief - "**And where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?**"
- the wail of unbelief - "**But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.**"

"And the Lord looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?"

Then Gideon showed the strength of unbelief - "**And he said unto Him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel?**"

and, lastly,

- the resources of unbelief - "**Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my Father's house.**"

How often have we been like Gideon, looking around at our circumstances, and influenced by our surroundings, instead of looking up and trusting in the Lord!

“Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to God alone.”

We see the importance of being strong in - and full of - faith, from four instances we have recorded of the Lord blessing others for the faith's sake of those who came to Him on their behalf (Mark 2:5; Matthew 8:10; 15:28; John 4:50). The palsied man was healed, the centurion's servant raised up, the Syrophenician woman's daughter was liberated, and the nobleman's son restored, because of - and for - the faith's sake of those who brought them to Christ. Unbelief stays the hand of God, and hinders Him, as it did Jesus of old, from doing many mighty works through us. Unbelief is like a brake upon the Gospel chariot, which hinders its progress, and is a libel upon the character of God.

VI - *Isaiah, or lip sins.*

“Woe is me! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips.”

This is a two-fold confession.

First, “I have been silent.” He seems to say, “I have not told the people their sins, I have not declared Thy will to them, and I have not preached Thy Word.”

Second, **“I am a man of unclean lips,”** “I have sinned myself, so how can I speak of sin? and I am unclean, so how can I speak to others?”

Brethren,

- Have we been silent on any subject?
- Have we kept back part of the price?
- Have we declared the whole Gospel?
- Have we preached the Lordship of Christ, as well as Jesus the Saviour?
- Have we held up the Person of Christ as the Holy Spirit does in the Epistle of John, when He says we are to be holy as Christ is holy, righteous as He is righteous, pure as He is pure, to walk as He walked, and to walk in the light as He is in the light?
- Have we insisted on full surrender to Christ, so that His life may be manifested in our mortal bodies?
- Can we say, as the Apostle Paul could, in addressing the elders at Ephesus, **“I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God?”**
- Could we say, if to-day were to be the end of our earthly course, **“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith?”**
- Have we reproved the unruly, warned the uncharitable, and told out with no uncertain sound the result of decision for Christ?
- Have we told the sinner of his doom, as well as the saint of his destination?

- Have we declared that God is Light as well as Love. Majesty as well as Mercy, a Consuming Fire as well as Compassion, and the Righteous One as well as the Redeemer?
- Have we told out the two-fold nature of sin to the unsaved - that man is a sinner because of what he is, and because of what he has done?
- Have we spoken of the death of Christ as the expression of God's righteousness, as well as of His love?
- Have we declared how the grace of God affects the whole man-not only his position and welfare hereafter, but here, the body of the believer being the temple of the Holy Ghost?

What has been the reason of our silence? Has it been from the fear of man? or has it been because we have not experienced a full apprehension of Christ ourselves?

The secret of all failure in this respect, is the neglect of the prayerful study of the Word, and not applying to ourselves what we preach to others.

Oh! For the spirit of the saintly M'Cheyne! It is common to find him speaking thus in his diary:

"July 31st - Sabbath afternoon: On Judas betraying Christ. Much more tenderness than I ever felt before. Oh! That I might abide in the bosom of Him who washed Judas's feet, and dipped His hand into the same dish with him, and warned him, and grieved over him, that I might catch the infection of His love, of His tenderness, so wonderful, so unfathomable!"

Let us remember that the truth of God - as a matter of experience - is only the truth of God to us, as we prove it to be so.

VII - *Peter, or partial obedience.*

We are all acquainted with the failure and disappointment of the disciples when they had been fishing all night and had taken nothing (Luke 5:4-7).

As they were washing their nets, the Lord Himself came to them, and said to Peter, "**Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.**"

Peter answered, "**We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless, at Thy word I will let down the net. And when they had done this, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.**"

Now the Lord had told Peter to let down the nets, but he only let down a net,. the consequence was the net broke, On another occasion, when the Lord told them to let down a net, we read, they "**drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three; and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken**" (John 21:6, 11).

We must beware of partial obedience.

It means damage when we quibble and question the Lord's word, We may be sure that we shall smart for it. When we hesitate over His command, instead of heartily obeying it, we shall suffer.

*It is only partial obedience when we follow Christ as Peter did - afar off - instead of being like Caleb, who followed the Lord fully; or, like the Psalmist, when he said, “**My soul followeth hard after Thee**” (Psalm 63:8), (or “*is joined to Thee*,” for it is the same word that is translated “**joined**” in connection with the scales of leviathan, of which we read, “**They are joined one to another, they stick together, that they cannot be sundered**” Job 41:17).*

There is only partial obedience when we are occupied with the work of the Master, as Martha was, and do not sit at the feet of the Master, as Mary did, in contemplation of Him.

What we want, the late Mr. Bewley of Dublin, well expressed to those surrounding his death-bed: “See that you have the characteristics of the three in the home at Bethany - Lazarus, the risen man; Mary, the listener to the word of Jesus; and Martha, active for Christ.”

There is only partial obedience when we are taken up with the blessings of the Lord - not with the Lord Himself.

Thomas Lye says, “Outward enjoyments are indeed sweet; but my God, the Author of them, is infinitely more sweet. They have all, even the most delicate of them, a tang and smack of the cask and channel through which they come. A single God is infinitely more sweet than the enjoyment of all created good things that come from Him. Though, indeed, I can smile when my corn and wine and oil increase, and bear a part with my valleys when they stand so thick with corn that they even laugh and sing - alas! this without the enjoyment of a God is but a mere leaping of the head after the soul is gone. True, indeed, these are some of God’s love-tokens; but what are these to His person and presence? These, indeed, are rich cabinets; but, oh! the light of His countenance - that, that is the jewel! In having these, I can say with Esau, ‘**I have much**,’ but, give me Him, I can exult, and, triumphing, say with Jacob, ‘**I have all**.’ These are some of His left-hand favors, some of His bottles of milk, and gifts, a fit portion for Ishmael . . . but it is an Isaac’s inheritance, waters of the upper fountains, which my soul thirsts for; those right-hand blessings, His presence, His soul-ravishing presence, in which there is ‘**fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore**,’ These may serve for my comfortable passage, but nothing but Himself can content and satisfy. He alone can fill up all the gaping chinks and chasms of my soul. He is my Sun and Shield, my Root and Branch, my Foundation and Corner Stone. He only can answer all my desires, all my necessities. My God and my All!”

There is only partial obedience when we preach the comforts of the Gospel, and not the claims of the Gospel.

Is there not abundant room for confession to the Lord, when we think of:

- Our want of conformity to Christ;
- Our littleness of love to Him who loved us unto the death;
- Our lack of whole-heartedness in the service of Christ;
- Our need of humility and likeness to Him, who is meek and lowly in heart;
- The opportunities that we have let slip for doing good; our ease and selfishness;
- Our coldness towards other Christians;

- Our jealousy towards our brethren who have been used of God; and
- Our failure to rejoice in the success of others?

Verily, as we bow ourselves before the Lord, we have to confess with one, who has long since gone into the Master's presence, "I am nothing, I do nothing; I compare myself to Lazarus, with this difference, his sores were all outside, but mine are all inside." O brethren, let the Psalmist's two-fold prayer be ours, "**Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting**" (Psalm 139:23, 24).

Search, then lead. Search us with Thine eyes of fire, that we may know the evil of our sinful flesh, so that, with Job, we may abhor ourselves, then lead us to see the value and virtue of that precious blood which cleanseth from all sin, and reveal to us more fully, the sympathy and love beaming from those eyes of Thine, which are not only as eyes of fire (Revelation 1:14), but as those of a dove (Song of Solomon 5:12), tender and true.

Search us! Look at us as Thou didst look at Peter (Luke 22:61), and bring home to our hearts the selfishness that has characterized our life and service - the self-aims, the self-sufficiency, the self-love, the self-seeking, and the self-glorying, then lead us to Thyself - to Thy heart of love, that beats in sympathy for us; to Thy hand of power, able and willing to uphold us; and cause us to abide in Thee, so that Thou mayest manifest Thine own life through us, that with Thy servant Paul we may say - because of the result of Thy grace - "**we live, we labour, we speak, and yet not we, but Christ.**"

Search us, to show us our weakness, our inability to do, or to be anything apart from Thee, and our entire dependence upon Thee, and also to know in the truest, fullest sense, that without Thee we can do nothing; then lead us to rest in Thyself, and to know that Thy strength is made perfect in our weakness, as Thy love has been made perfect in our unworthiness; and also to prove each moment, that strengthened by, and in Thee, we can do all things (Philippians 4:13).

Search us, by putting us in Thy sieve, so that all the chaff of worldliness may be winnowed away; then lead us to delight in Thyself alone, for as Thou art the Object of our heart, the pride of life must give way to humility of soul, the lust of the flesh must give place to love to Thyself, and the lust of the eyes must give place to entire satisfaction in gazing upon Thee.

Search us! Put us in the crucible, to remove the dross of sin and self which gathers on our spirits, and hides the reflection of Thine own lovely face, so that our want of conformity is seen, instead of Thy beauty; then lead us, that Thine own character may appear, and Thine own loveliness be manifested.

Search us! Bring the knife of Thy Word, and remove from us all the fruitless and unprofitable things in our lives, all the questionable things that are like so many suckers, draining away the strength that should go to help that which is fruitful and useful; then cause us to bring forth fruit - the fruit of the Spirit in His manifold perfection, the more fruit of abundant grace, the much fruit of more abundant labour, and the fruit that shall remain - of souls blest, who shall be our crown and rejoicing in the day of Thine appearing.

Search us! Chasten us with the rod, if necessary, but give us not to despise Thy dealing, nor faint under it; only let the desired effect be produced, namely, the peaceable fruits of righteousness; then lead us to learn the lesson Thou wouldst teach, so we shall bless the hand that strikes, and know it is but an expression of Thy Fatherly love and tender care, for whom Thou lovest Thou dost chasten.

Search us! Search our hearts, and see if there be any wrong motive, or impure desire; search our thoughts, see if they are wandering from Thee; search our ways, see if there are any wrong actions, any doubtful things in the life which are hindering us, any stumbling-blocks over which weaker brethren are falling; then lead us, that our affections may be set only on Thee, and every thought be in subjection to Thee - so shall our ways please Thee.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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