

THE CENTRAL IDEA OF CHRISTIANITY

By Bishop J. T. Peck

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1. THE CENTRAL IDEA MADE CERTAIN

The Scripture Argument

The interpretation of a system depends upon its central idea. This is seen in any mechanism. The different parts of a watch, for instance, would be perfectly unintelligible to the most careful observer, without the idea which produced it.

We purpose, therefore, to discuss the question, “What is the central idea of Christianity?”

The great idea which originated the several parts of this amazing gospel plan is to be ascertained, not by accidental reading or limited study of the Bible, but by the strictest attention to its *whole drift*. Principles, in the abstract and in the concrete, must be collated with the utmost care. The smallest particulars, as well as the most prominent and extensive, must be viewed in their relations to each other, and the grand scope of the whole divine teaching ascertained. Whoever does this, will, we think, find the following truths, tending to a solution of our problem -*clearly established*:

1. The choice of God for the moral condition of the human race was perfect purity; hence He created man in his own image.
2. As this was once the choice of God, it must be eternally so, and the divine preference or will and can never be met but by perfect moral purity.
3. Sin interfered with this choice, to the full extent of its existence and reign, and hence called for the severest divine displeasure.
4. There has, therefore, *never been and never can be* the slightest toleration of sin in any divine communications; it is condemned with unsparing severity in its most secret and plausible forms
5. As man, by becoming a sinner, has incurred the divine displeasure, he can be saved from calamity and made perfectly happy only by complete deliverance from sin.
6. Remedial measures, originating in God, must aim directly at the destruction of sin. Accepting sin in any of its forms, making provision for its continuance, its justification, or excuse, in the soul of the saved, to any extent, would be trifling with Him and impossible in Him.
7. The sacrificial offering of Christ, and the means and methods of the gospel, reveal the plan of salvation by the destruction of sin and the restoration of man to the image of God, *and can, in no way, be reconciled with the idea of salvation within sin.*(even despite any quantity of approved high-sounding rhetoric regarding “forgiveness” ES)

We have not room to amplify these propositions, or to introduce the Scriptures which prove them. Nor is it necessary, as they will not be questioned by any whom we can hope to reach. But if they truly

indicate the drift of revelation, they show, without contest that the great idea of Christianity is holiness; that this vast scheme of suffering, teaching, labor, and organization, has all been produced and is carried on solely to deliver man from his sins, for the ultimate perfection of Christian character. There are certain Scriptures which show conclusively that we have not mistaken the teachings of revelation upon this great question.

St. Paul to the Colossians has this remarkable saying in regard to Christ: "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus; whereunto I also labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily." Then to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus," is the grand and sole design of the original apostolic preaching. Christ as our Mediator, appears among men to answer to that idea. He came into the greatest of the apostles to energize his soul, his eloquence, and his labors, for that purpose alone. Can there be a stronger declaration that the perfection of Christian character is the central idea of the gospel?

The Analytical Argument

In exact proportion that the various branches of the Christian church and the heretical sects have departed from this original idea, have been their errors in doctrine, in ceremonies, in morals, and in government. We shall attempt to reach and expose these various errors only so far as the developments and brief application of what we believe to be the true idea, may serve this purpose.

The Lord's Supper is no central idea. And the application of water by one man, to the person of another, can be of no importance in itself; but solemnly performed "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," it carries us out of itself to the wondrous work of which it is "the sign and seal." Baptism is not the central idea of the system. But upon further observation we perceive that an organization exists, that there is a vast and extended brotherhood, with all the powers and functions of a distinct and vigorous life; and we may ask, "Is not this the consummation of the plan?" Certainly not; for an idea must produce an organization, and hence must precede it and be essentially independent of it. It may pervade the organization, but only as the soul the body, without losing its identity. The church is not central in this system. Examining still more closely the acts of this society, we perceive that stated public addresses are delivered; but these, like all speeches or harangues, are to get something done. Preaching is, therefore, not the idea which produced Christianity. Solemn invocation addressed to an invisible Being is another stated exercise; but this expresses an emotion or thought, or implores some good or the aversion of some ill, out of itself. It was not, then, for the production of prayer that this system was instituted; and the same is true of praise.

As we travel inward, the light increases, indicating nearer approach to the sun of truth at the center. An unseen power has revealed to the soul the fact of its guilt, and it writhes in agony. But is this an object? Is the sufferer to be left in this condition? Surely not. Conviction, then, is not central to this system. This state is followed by an inward loathing of sin – a voluntary and decisive turning away from it. But repentance cannot exist alone. It can only be conceived of as a consequence or a means. Faith grasps a Redeemer, and hence, great as it is, is only an instrumentality – a condition of blessings out of itself. It was not, then, merely that men might believe, that this dispensation was given. *Pardon only absolves from past acts.* Of itself, it effects no radical change in the moral condition or tendencies of the sinner. Left at this point, he will the next instant commence a fresh accumulation of guilt. Justification is not, therefore; the central idea of Christianity. Bring the dead soul to life, let it be "begotten of God" -- "born again" -- "born from above," and does this alone meet the divine purpose in commencing the work of grace? Is regeneration the grand ultimate point to which the whole gospel scheme tends? (together with all its controversial dependants like "being filled with The Spirit", and the many gifts of the Spirit). Does this properly imply that specific moral state which, of itself, fits the soul for heaven? We grant that the word may be used in a sense which would embrace it; but is this its proper use?

Carefully examining every detail of the system, within our reach, we find nothing else that will, as an end, meet the demands of the Almighty, explain the vast details of the remedial scheme, or account for the splendid results of that scheme in this world and in the next. By the test of analysis, then, as well as of revelation, *holiness (becoming like Him -perfect in love and character) is the central idea of Christianity.*

The Historical Argument

Our next appeal is to history. And the question raised here, is, What is the law of religious development and power as an agent of reform? Or, in other words, regarding Christianity as the one grand agent, ordained by the Almighty to reform the world, -in proportion to what -has it been successful?

The following facts are beyond question. An individual believer takes his place in the church. He has wealth, and uses it freely for the benefit of the organization. He has talents, and they are zealously devoted to the defense of the church. He has popular influence, and he uses it to gather adherents to the faith. But his piety is superficial. Words escape him every day which show that they come from an impure fountain suited only to unholy things. The most splendid talents would be no substitute for holiness since the brightest genius the world ever saw must pause at the gate of this celestial paradise, if a spot of sin be found upon his garments.

On the other hand, take a man whose heart is entirely consecrated; whose pure life indicates purity of heart, whose holy example commands universal respect, whose simple, unpretending efforts move all who hear his voice in prayer, or praise, or exhortation. Now, let him yield to temptation, -- admit corruption into his heart, -- and how soon it is seen that he is shorn of his strength! Just in proportion as he recedes from his elevated position in Christian holiness, his power of usefulness diminishes. Nor can he supply this deficiency by anything else. He who loses his purity may strive to save his power by increase of zeal, by enlarged charities, by the severest austerities; but it is all of no avail. He makes himself a living proof that *holiness is the measure of power.*

A comparison of two men in the ministry will strengthen this conclusion. One is a man of shining talents, of genteel address, of popular eloquence; the other, ordinary in all these respects -in all natural qualities is inferior to his brother. But he is a man of God -- a man of faith. His soul is filled with love -- "perfect love that casteth out fear." He moves among the people like a spirit from eternity. His rebukes of sin fall with dreadful force upon the hearts of the wicked. His sermons, his prayers, his expostulations, his tears, all indicate the presence of an extraordinary power; and thousands are converted, sanctified, and saved through his help. But the other man sees no such fruits of his labor. Souls may 'be converted, but he feels that it is in spite of him rather than through his help. He wonders at the difference. He increases his exertions, elaborates his sermons with more learning and research -- improves their rhetoric and oratory, but all to no avail. He may increase the admiration of his hearers, but he cannot subdue their hearts, bringing them weeping to the foot of the cross, and present them with joy as the trophies of the Redeemer. But let him seek and obtain the baptism of Fire. Let fire from God's altar touch his lips and purify his soul, and he becomes a new man. He does not throw away his talents, his genius, his learning; but they are all sanctified. With the simplicity of a child, and a heart overflowing with love, he preaches the truth, and it is "in the demonstration of the Spirit, and of power," and a glorious reformation follows. Whatever may be the seeming variations arising from the deficiency of our knowledge, we have, in these particular instances, strong historic indications of a general law.

What is true of individuals is true of churches also. Wherever a number of Christians have associated together, with the evident and exclusive aim of promoting purity of heart and life, they have prospered.

The most profound attention to the history of the general church will show the same unvarying truth.

Under the influence of apostolic purity, the early victories of the cross were as decisive in the reformation of individual character and public manners, as they were unparalleled in their extent and power. But the gradual departure from primitive simplicity, and the immense accumulation of corruption in heart and life which followed, by slow degrees destroyed the power of the church to act as a reforming agent.

The Wesleyan reformation was first a movement in favor of holiness. The true doctrine of Christian Perfection was then perhaps more clearly taught and powerfully enforced than at any former time since the days of primitive purity. And while the great mass of converts 'made it their aim, large numbers pressed on to the actual experience and living demonstration of the power of Christ to cleanse from all sin. And mark the result: "No weapon formed against them could prevail." From the feeblest beginnings, without wealth, without power, in the midst of the most violent persecutions, they have moved on in a career of usefulness unparalleled since the days of the apostles. (written before 1850)

An Appeal to Experience

Our final appeal is to experience. And here the heart of every man must answer for itself. If the grand design of the gospel be anything less than perfect purity then the soul can find full rest without it. If it is only pardon and regeneration, then the discovery of remaining corruptions in the heart of those seeking purity ought to be no cause of uneasiness; the prayers of those who groan for full redemption ought remain unheeded; or, if relief be found, it ought to be in some other system -through some other name than the name of Jesus.

But what facts does experience reveal? Why, that a deep and painful sense of inward impurity may remain after all guilt is washed away; that in the midst of all the divine comforts of adoption the soul still may long for the rest of perfect love; that the more devoted is the life of the regenerate Christian, the more intense is his desire to be cleansed from all sin, and while he is without the evidence of this finished work, he has more or less of fear for the future. By the most powerful internal convictions, and the most obvious tendencies of every work of grace that has heretofore been wrought upon his heart, he is urged on to this glorious consummation. And it is not in accordance with experience that he who sighs for purity of heart must sigh in vain – that he who cries, "Create in me a clean heart, O God," must pray in vain. From numerous examples in Scripture, from the testimonies of thousands long since gone to their reward, and of thousands still living, the declaration of Jesus is amply sustained: "*Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.*"

And precisely as it ought to be, if this is the center of the scheme, here the soul finds rest -here its perfect satisfaction. All its desires, all its passions, all its plans are in complete harmony with the will of God. From this sanctified state it can develop itself without inward obstruction -from this position it can expand and advance with freedom and power.

Thus directly and inevitably does experience conduct us to holiness as the great want of immortal man – the grand design of redemption.

We have now examined this question in the light of the Holy Scriptures, and found that this stupendous system of revelation and redeeming mercy was undertaken "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." We have subjected the scheme to the severest analysis. Moving inward from different positions outside of it, we have found holiness alone at its center. We have consulted history and experience, and found that in fact holiness is the measure of power. We are compelled, therefore, by the strictest logical necessity, to assert that *holiness is the central idea of Christianity*.

The Argument Applies

It will, we think, at once be perceived that we have reached a position of immense practical importance. If this be the true central idea of the Christian scheme, we may measure everything by it, which, in the lapse of centuries has come to be attached to this scheme. Evidently enough, whatever has no adaptation to produce entire sanctification in the hearts of believers, -- “to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus,” -- *does not belong to the system, and must be promptly rejected.*

From the nature of God it must be certain that he has made no mistakes in the details of a system designed to restore to man his lost image; and it is wonderful to see with what skill and directness he has adjusted everything to this grand aim. He has revealed his fiery law, which flames out in wrath against every variety of sin. He has exhibited the immaculate purity of his own character, which causes seraphim to cry, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” He has uttered the unchangeable law to his people, “Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy.” He provided a Redeemer, whose blood made ample atonement for all sin. He gave the Holy Ghost to awaken, to regenerate, and to sanctify us. He gave his word to teach us the necessity of holiness. He moved men of strong faith to pray for the blessing on behalf of his people, and sketched with the pen of inspiration the characters and lives of those who had reached this glorious perfection. He bade us “*mark the perfect man and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.*” He established the ministry to explain to us the way of holiness, to rouse us from the slumbers of sin, and persuade us to “lay hold on eternal life.” Indeed it may be safely said that while everything which God has instituted for man is most evidently designed and adapted to lead to purity of heart, he has omitted nothing which is essential to this result.

But we cannot conclude this discussion without inquiring, “*Why must the doctrine of holiness be assigned a subordinate place in systematic divinity, or even be excluded altogether?*” We have seen that this was not the intention of God; and, so far from retracing the true evangelical view of the doctrine, or apologizing to the world for the importance we have given it, we must in all honesty ask pardon of God and man for having asserted it so timidly, dwelt upon it with so few tears and such minimal passion, and done so little about it. It is the center of our system. The mission which we have accepted at the hands of God, is “to spread scriptural holiness over these lands;” and we cannot allow the doctrine a secondary, or a non-functioning place in the faith of the church. It must come out from its obscurity, extend its light, and its controlling power through every communion, and permeate the doctrines, the hearts, and the lives of the people, before Christianity can assert its rights in the conquest of the world. In the presence of Christians of every name, we demand for it the position which God has assigned it. What worthy motive can we have in denying it this position? Opposition to holiness is opposition to Christianity – a real, though not an intended denial of the rights of God and the privileges of man – a setting aside of the one grand object for which the Redeemer died and the church was instituted. And when this is done, what have we left? What one doctrine of the gospel is of any use, or of any significance, if holiness is excluded from the system? You might as well tear out the heart, and then attempt to give value to the veins and arteries and blood, as to reject holiness and still hope to save the gospel scheme. You might as well burn up your towns and leave just their signboards standing, as to destroy holiness, and still insist upon justification by faith, or any other great doctrine of Christianity.

The Contents of The Idea

Its general expression is “perfect love;” love to God without any mixture of slavish fear; love to man without selfishness; love which springs up in the soul at the time of conversion, increasing, extending, conquering, and wholly superseding all love of the world, in its wealth, its honors, its pleasures; all forms of self-love which seek to make the demands of self superior to the claims of God or the rights of man – love filling the soul, controlling the intellect, sensibilities and will, becoming the source of

thought, feeling and action; realizing the exact spirit of those great commandments, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” We understand perfect love to be inclusive of the following facts and results:

1. Entire Consecration.
2. Perfect Faith.
3. Cleansing of the soul from all inward impurities.
4. Perfect Love gives paramount power to the will of God.

2. THE CENTRAL IDEA NEGLECTED

We believe that Christians, generally, are sanctified only partly.

We remark that the probabilities are not against, but in favor of this position. Let it, however, be distinctly understood, that we speak not now of unconverted persons or apostates in the church. There are, doubtless, many of these. But we refer to those who are truly honest Christians, in the sense of actual inward experience. And, first of all, let no one assume that we undervalue the converted state. Pause for a while over those who can honestly say, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” What reasons have they for gratitude? Many!

Their sins are pardoned, and they were very numerous, and very great, but the inward corruptions of a fallen nature were long voluntarily retained. Thoughts of depraved action were secretly but fondly cherished. Desires that would shrink from the light of day; motives that were “earthly, sensual, devilish,” were still freely encouraged within.

We cannot over-estimate the value of this great work. What a work of love – of love divine – is this surprising transformation! The soul of man alive from the dead, with a clear apprehension of its heirship to glory, unending as the being of God! The fruits of the Spirit newborn within, love gracefully leading the heavenly procession! Its appetites changed from earthly to spiritual! Its aims elevated from a world of sin and death to a world of God-like purity, love, and immortality! And all this without claim – without merit; nay, in despite of a life of ingratitude, a life of rebellion, which were enough to have vindicated forever his eternity of woe! All for the sake of Christ alone! Well might the soul, thus raised from the dead, exclaim,

“I’ll praise my Maker while I’ve breath,
And, when my voice is lost in death,
Praise shall employ my nobler powers
My days of praise shall ne’er be past,
While life, or thought, or being, lasts,
Or immortality endures!”

But we return to the position that Christians generally, are sanctified only in part.

Verily, the mere suspicion that the mass of Christians are sanctified but in part, ought to rouse the spirit of inquiry throughout the length and breadth of Zion, and the positive knowledge of the fact ought to enlist the sympathies, and engage the energies of the church, until we can say, in truth and holy triumph, Christians generally are sanctified wholly.

The Fact Shown in The State of The Church

“Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” The reception of the Holy Ghost, in a special sense, is *every believer’s privilege*. This is evident from the promises made. John said, “He that cometh

after me shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” The special character of this baptism appears in the language of the Savior given by St. Luke: “Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” Now “the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty;” and “they were all with one accord in one place;” “and there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.” It was hence evident that this special baptism was provided for the whole church. St. Peter confirmed this opinion. “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the lord our God shall call.”

Though devoutly grateful for the special manifestations of saving grace, wherever they appear, the friends of Zion cannot fail to see, and mourn over, her astonishing lack of grace. Ineffectiveness is felt in so great an extent, as to excite alarm and anxious inquiry into its causes and remedies. The church question – involving the whole field of its essential and organic life, of its historic and prophetic relations to itself, to human governments, and to the ultimate destiny of the race – has no one aspect so intensely interesting as this: What is its essential lack? With all deference to those who seek to solve this problem, in other modes, we believe that, The baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire is the great present want of the church.

1. In proof of this position, we observe, that, The Vision of the church is dim.
2. The life of the church is feeble.
3. The holiness of the church is defective.
4. The power of the church is inadequate.

The church must mourn comparative ineffectiveness in her enterprises. Look at the mission of the church to herself. To purge her own members from inward sin -to secure their steady, rapid growth in holiness and love – to exercise a wholesome, thorough, Christian discipline, recovering as many as possible of her erring children, and promptly removing those who, by their lack of religion, do more harm to her than she can do good to them -to maintain her spiritual services and temporal presence, she is sent to herself. This mission, in fact, if not in form, she has always recognized. Efforts to accomplish these noble purposes for herself may be seen in all her societies. But who can carefully mark them, and not feel grieved at heart? Her most vigorous endeavors to lead her members into the fountain that “cleanseth from all sin,” fall vastly short of their object. Indeed, even to convince them that entire salvation is possible, and necessary, to rouse them to a spirit of fervent, agonizing, persevering prayer for it, seems wholly beyond her strength. She tries to do it; but her small successes, for which the Lord be praised, what extensive, mournful failures mark her history! What can be the cause, if not that the immense aggregate of her inward corruptions deprives her of the spiritual holy power with which she is bound in duty to prosecute this work? How can her ministers thoroughly and effectually “show the house of Jacob her iniquities, and God’s people their sins,” and lead them to the cleansing blood, while they are themselves neither made “perfect in love,” nor “groaning after it.” The cause of such lamentable weakness in these Heaven -sanctioned efforts, stands out as clear as the sun.

3. THE CLAIMS OF THE CENTRAL IDEA

It is Desirable to Be Holy

It is greatly desirable to be holy, at least so it would seem in our experience; so, if we are not wholly mistaken, it must seem to all. Even opponents of the doctrine, must, upon sober reflection, exceedingly regret that, in their humble opinion, no available provisions have been made in the gospel, to save the

soul entirely, and in this life, from so dread an 'evil; -or that provision having been made, it is placed beyond our reach; -- or if entirely possible, we are so constituted that we never can, or never will, avail ourselves of it. We have often imagined that devout persons, unfortunately restricted by theological systems, must be driven again and again to search the Scriptures, and pore over the records of piety, to see whether, after all, there is not some lurking error in the view, which deprives the thirsty soul freely drinking of salvation; so abhorrent are the slightest motions of inward depravity to the truly regenerate. We shall write in harmony, therefore, with the feelings of such Christians, whatever difficulties mere theory may oppose, when we attempt to show how desirable it is to be "pure in heart." And amongst the thousands who in honest faith receive the doctrine of holiness in actual experience as a practical reality, there must be extremely few who, even under the greatest delusion, cherish sin – or defend it from real affection; and yet surely the delay, the shrinking when the subject is mentioned, and the various apologetic theories put forth, justify the conviction that the true desirableness of "a clean heart," *is not appreciated by the organized church.*

Holiness is desirable in itself. It is purity; and we are formed to admire purity. Even the garments we wear about us are comfortable to us only when they are perfectly clean. If they become soiled, they are offensive. We brush them again and again, to remove from them the smallest particles of dust. If their fabric will allow it, we wash them and polish them, until they are as white as the driven snow. What comfort, what genuine satisfaction we realize, when every garment is perfectly pure; and how uneasy, how dissatisfied with ourselves, when the dust and sweat of the day cling to us. With what instinctive loathing do we look upon the filthy and negligent around us. They may have excellent traits of character; they may be our kindred, and we may hold them in the kindest regard, but can by no means avoid that nervous shrinking, in their presence, which was designed to protect us from pollution.

The Results of Holiness are Desirable.

These are matters of experience. They can never be appreciated without experience. We begin to realize them at conversion when the work of holiness begins. Happiness is felt which no tongue can describe, arising partly out of relief from the enormous burden of sin, from the deep consciousness of guilt, from a terrible sense of the wrath of God, from the awful fear of punishment – happiness produced in part by the contrast which the soul feels between a state of pardon and the previous state of condemnation. But, besides all this, there are the beginnings of a new and spiritual life. The present manifest workings of the Holy Spirit upon the heart and feeling of inward renovation are all suited to the constitution of the soul. Where the power of inward depravity is broken, and the feelings, motives, and will are brought into harmony with the will of God, inward comfort and joy are the natural results.

We have endeavored to show that it is desirable to be holy. We trust that this conviction has been deepened in the minds of some who have read. We are certain that little can be done without it. If a believer can see no charms in holiness, -- nothing to be desired in a clean heart – in being wholly the Lord's – in perfect love, there can be no hope that he will endeavor to obtain it. He will not dwell upon it in his thoughts, will not study it in the revealed will of God, -- will not plead for it in his prayers. But even so it is manifestly improper to speak of a believer who sees nothing desirable in holiness. A man who can say, "I have no desire to be holy," cannot actually be a true believer in Christ. The smallest degree of justifying, saving faith brings this charming state within the view of the soul, begins within the gracious work of initial cleansing, and gives an enjoyment so infinitely transcending every other, that delight in holiness and a desire to obtain it in greater measure, comes along with a state of pardon.

Desirable! Ah! If it be desirable to be relieved from all fear – to be elevated to a state of calm and permanent bliss – to be able to glorify God even in the martyr's fire – to be ready for death without a moment's warning – to live with God forever, it is desirable to be holy. We thus see as clearly as we may with the light allowed us, one grand claim of the central idea of Christianity.

It Is Necessary To Be Holy

Many will admit that it is desirable, that it transcends in importance all other objects of interest to an immortal soul. They are convinced that it is possible; for they do not dare to limit the power of God, nor the effectiveness of his remedies.

But they do not regard it as necessary, -- as indispensable. They incline to resolve the whole into a question of expediency or convenience. And, as it is inconvenient to give thorough attention to it; inconvenient to part with many cherished worldly gratifications; inconvenient to be wholly and only Christians, they pass it by, and think they have committed no wrong, violated no law, run no risk! But we propose to show that complete deliverance from sin is not a mere question of convenience; that it is not left simply to our discretion; that it is a *fixed, unalterable necessity*; a matter of imperative obligation, demanding immediate attention – thorough and successful attention – such a necessity as that failure in relation to it must be finally fatal.

We argue, from the purpose of man's creation, and his primal moral condition. It is certainly in harmony with Revelation, as well as the general sense of the church, to say, "The chief end of man" is, "to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." But God is glorified by holiness alone. Sin interferes with his glory. It is the grand element and fact of rebellion in his universal empire. Wrong in itself, essentially and unalterably corrupt, is against all his plans, and the reason for all the disturbance in a government, designed to show the power of universal harmony in the right. Just in proportion to its extent, *it prevents the glory* which would accrue to the Divine Being in the reign of universal goodness, happiness, and progressive perfection. Conquered, held in check, and resisted as it is, in the justified state, it yet, however concealed and plausible, is an antagonistic force that resists the spirit and plans of God, and loses no opportunity to seek and gain the ascendancy. Only the heart entirely consecrated, from which sin is all excluded, which is wholly dissolved in love, can completely glorify God. Then all the ransomed powers flow sweetly in the channel of the divine requirements.

We argue it from the nature of God. We cannot comprehend the depths of infinite purity. The heavenly creatures cry before Him who sits upon the throne, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." This is the nature we are to please. To this awful moral attribute we must be adjusted in character, affections, motives and will, if we will reach the other object of our creation "to enjoy him forever." With this holy nature we are to be compared, not in its infinitude, but in its freedom from all defilement, and its unchangeable devotion to the good and the true. With this august, living purity, we are to be united. God proposes to dwell in us as His temple, -- to "sup with us and we with him." How appropriately, then, are we required to "come out, and be separate; touch not, taste not, the unclean thing;" to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." In pity to our fallen condition, he begins his reign in us before "sin is all destroyed."

An Appeal to The General Church And Especially to Those Who Are Sanctified in Part

The deep solemnity of the truths we have reached in this discussion, and especially in the chapter on the central idea neglected, must profoundly impress us.

It calls the church to profound reflection. Facts so immensely important in their bearings cannot be passed lightly over. Whoever neglects to consider them carefully and thoroughly, must incur a fearful responsibility. Throughout the length and breadth of Zion, let us anxiously inquire how much we have lost by dependence upon false remedies for the evils which have threatened us. What intense folly to have speculated so much and so wildly upon the means of church renovation and power!

It calls the church to deep humiliation. Can we brethren, look at our sad deficiencies, and retain our pride, our Arrogance? Is it a small evil, that we have grieved God's Holy Spirit; that we have declined

the light, the life, the holiness and power, which he has urged upon us, and consequently spread “blasting and mildew” through such large portions of the heritage of God?

Finally, it calls the church to fervent prayer. The church, the whole church; for what will it avail if only here and there a weeping few shall pour out their complaints before God?? They may save themselves. They may save some far off and near. They may secure refreshing seasons, limited in extent and power. They may even save the general church from dissolution and divine renunciation. All this they may undoubtedly do. But this is not what the present age demands. The church and the world require a revival so deep and all-pervading as ‘to shake the nations; so pure and glorious as to wrap the earth in a flame of light; so benign and penetrating as to enter all hearts, and move and mold all classes of society, all departments of education, and all human governments.

We protest it is no new doctrine we are preaching, it is no new struggle in which we are engaged, it is no new victory we claim. It is no new profession we make. God is our witness for how many ages this very faith has been the faith of the living church, how long and fierce has been its war with the coldness, the unbelief, the worldly-mindedness, the corruptions of men; and yet how many and how glorious have been its triumphs. To these very triumphs every bright spirit in heaven is indebted for his crown, and upon the success of this very faith the salvation of the world depends. This is the vindication of our zeal.

Holiness Must Be Preached

We believe the solemn vows of that ministry which does not aim directly at the promotion of experiential and practical holiness are madeligh of in the fearful presence of him who will judge the living and the dead. Philosophy is valuable so far as it removes the blindness from our spiritual vision, and reveals to our sight the true and the good. Polemics are in place when heresies obstruct the triumphant march of the King of kings. Rhetoric is available when it renders more transparent the medium through which the light of heaven shines upon the world. Oratory is at home in the sacred desk, when it is the out-gushing of an anointed soul. But when any or all of these assume to supersede or embellish the message of God to dying men, they are a fraud upon the soul so grievous and cruel as to deserve the indignation of earth, and the wrath of heaven. O, tell us, brethren beloved, what language within the power of man, deserves to supersede, or is able to embellish the heaven-inspired summons, “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,” or the solemn, thrilling announcement -- “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

The great objective of the gospel is to make men holy To accomplish this work, He appoints ambassadors – ministers of his grace, -- and puts the Bible into their hands, as the great declaration of terms, upon which men may be saved from all sin. They are authorized to offer freely, pardon to the guilty, regeneration to the dead, adoption to the alien, sanctification to the impure. They are by no means at liberty to adopt any other standard.

AUTHOR’S PREFACE

After twenty years of careful criticism and observation, the author responds to the call for another edition of this work, with much gratitude to God. And with increased confidence in all its main positions. In a most thorough revision he has not felt called upon to change one of them.

Let these positions be here formally stated:--

1. The essential depravity of the natural man is not completely remedied or removed in regeneration or the new birth. (consequences that follow acts of sin are, but not the innate corrupt propensities that ushered this active sin into our lives... ES)

2. Next, entire sanctification is provided, and offered to all believers in Christ.

3. In this work I have endeavored to show the loss and peril to the Church from the neglect of this great work of grace, so amply provided for all true believers. This sad fact needs no further amplification here. Let the chapter on "The Central Idea Neglected" be read; let heart examination go on at home, and everywhere, by the light of the Spirit; let history tell its own stories of earthliness, weakness, and defeat in the struggles of the Church, and we shall need to say nothing more. Let all men oppose sin, but holiness never -God forbid!

Give to each experiential doctrine its true distinctness and position. Perfect love is the center -the very heart -of the system, and so you must not tear it out. Let it be your joy to move forward with the power of every truth and every grace of the Gospel.

This effort to present to the Church a thoroughly scriptural and practical view of the Central Idea of Christianity, is humbly and prayerfully committed to God for his providential care and blessing, and to Christians of all denominations, for their candid examination, in view of the judgment of the great day. May it, then, appear that some valuable purpose has been served by the humble labors of The Author.

PREFATORY NOTE

Bishop Peck's book, "The Central Idea of Christianity," is logic on fire. Without question it is a book without a parallel in holiness literature. We consider it a piece of unanswerable and unassailable reasoning. To attempt to reduce it to a booklet size without injuring the argument was not an easy task, but we think we have condensed the book without diminishing it.

Here is a great book with a great message

George W. Ridout

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