

## I.—A FALSE ISSUE

The leader who has accustomed himself to years of public service can hardly realize the almost impossible task that is placed before the majority of people when they are asked to do some conspicuous act. People usually find such acts very difficult; and while they might be willing to receive Christ as a personal Saviour, they often shrink from taking a public step because of their natural timidity. Thus the real issue is many times subordinated to another; and that new issue is not only unreal, but is entirely foreign to the all-important question. In this connection it is often urged that the unsaved should be sufficiently in earnest to comply readily with any method or custom that may be employed. But is it not evident, in addition to the fact that such demands may be a denial of the doctrine of grace, that they are both unwarranted and unreasonable, since God has provided no enabling power whereby unregenerate people may do commendable acts for Him? A public confession is a far different task to the same timid person after he has received the new divine life; for he can then say by faith, and in all humility: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. iv. 13).

The one necessary step—the acceptance of Christ as Saviour—can be performed only in the secret of the heart itself, by a personal choice and action of the will. This is a dealing with Christ alone, and as the time of this decision is the most critical

moment in a human life, reason demands that it should be guarded from every distracting and confusing condition.

## II.—A FALSE ASSURANCE

A leader with a commanding personality may secure the public action of many when the issue is made one of religious merit through some public act. Under such an impression, a serious person may stand in a meeting who has no conception of what is involved in standing by faith on the Rock Christ Jesus; or he may be persuaded to abandon his natural timidity when he knows nothing of abandoning his Satanic tendency to self-help, and resting by faith on that which Christ has done for him. If questioned carefully, the basis of assurance with all such converts will be found to be no more than a consciousness that they have acted out the program prescribed for them.

## III.—“BACKSLIDING”

Careful students of evangelism have noticed that where the necessity of public action as a part of conversion has been most emphasized there has been a corresponding increase in the God-dishonoring record of so-called “backsliding”; and this is natural. The covenant of God is to keep eternally all who are truly saved, and there are no other provisions than the one way of salvation by Christ’s willing substitution, whereby God can be

just and still be the justifier of a sin-cursed soul. To attempt to "come unto God" on the grounds of a public performance, even with great earnestness, is but to fail, and the misguided soul who makes that attempt, when his hope has proven false, is often the hardest to reach thereafter.

#### IV.—DISCREDIT TO THE COVENANT OF GOD

As has just been stated, the essential and Scriptural doctrine of the eternal keeping by God of every regenerate soul has been brought into discredit and almost lost. This has come to pass through an attempt to reconcile His covenants with "actual experience" in evangelism to-day. It has been necessary to question this otherwise clear doctrine of the Scriptures to allow for the appalling percentage of failures in the ranks of supposed converts. But when it is remembered that the modification of that positive doctrine, and the forced interpretation of the Word of God to that end, has been attempted largely by those who have insisted on a spectacular conversion, their challenge of that glorious truth may be set aside without discussion.

Although an innumerable multitude may have been misguided by responding to false issues and have returned, sooner or later, to their own place outside Christian fellowship, the covenant of God is not involved. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost [eternally] that come unto God by him"—Christ (Heb. vii. 25); He

“is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24). And the soul that believes in Christ “shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John v. 24). Nor can any “pluck them out of my Father’s hand” (John x. 29), or separate them “from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. viii. 39).

It is quite possible for a newly-saved person so to misunderstand the forces and habits of the old life and the possible power and victory of the new life as to be overtaken in sin and appear, for a time, to be “in a far country”; yet, if he has ever been in the Father’s house as a son, he, like the prodigal is *still* a son, and therefore will be constantly constrained by the Spirit to arise and go to his Father.

Incalculable harm has been done to all Christendom by this widespread denial of the grace and faithfulness of God. Because of this denial, saints have been occupied with futile attempts at self-keeping to the neglect of true service for God, and intelligent sinners have feared to take the Christian’s position when reason warned them that such a position would be impossible for them to maintain.

#### V.—DISHONOR TO THE SPIRIT OF GOD

The aim of all public demands in modern evangelism is to terminate indifference and hesitation by

a positive decision. But this is sometimes undertaken without due regard for the whole process of preparation by the Spirit for the intelligent exercise of saving faith. Thus the all-important work of the Spirit for the unsaved has often been neglected and the Spirit dishonored in the vain attempt to hasten decisions and to secure visible results.

A true decision must depend upon the action of the will of the individual as he is moved by his own clear vision of his place in the saving work of Christ, and that vision must be created by the Spirit. When this is accomplished, there will be little occasion to argue and plead, and methods which are calculated to force a decision will be found to be superfluous; and any method which is superfluous is usually resented by intelligent people. Such methods create a sense of unreality where there should be a growing reality.

Many serious men have concluded that to send out workers to plead with individuals in a miscellaneous congregation is not only embarrassing to the people thus approached, but is, in the majority of cases, a service which hardens and repels. Forced decisions sometimes follow such appeals. These, they observe, are usually premature and unintelligent decisions; for in such methods there can be no certainty concerning the conviction by the Spirit and no very definite dependence upon His leading. On the other hand, the many who have resisted the personal appeal have been hardened or driven away.

Public methods which embarrass any person or class of persons may be not only useless but intrusive. There is little gained by inviting all Christians in a public gathering to stand, thus forcing all others into a conspicuous position, causing them annoyance and creating an occasion for prejudice. It is not strange that intelligent unsaved people sometimes avoid meetings where these methods are employed. By adopting such a program the evangelist or pastor may be hindering the very work of God which he is attempting to do.

If the spectacular element in public soul-winning is eliminated there will be less opportunity to count supposed results, and the test of conversion will be removed from the sphere of profession and made to rest on the reality of a changed life afterwards.

The sincere evangelist who fearlessly judges, before God, every method he employs—judging them as to their exact value or possible harm in their influence on immortal souls—will find that many methods in evangelism are more a habit than a necessity, or that they have been employed in an effort to produce *visible* results, rather than to create a means by which sin-burdened souls may find rest and peace through a personal and intelligent faith in Christ as Saviour.

Lest it seem that this criticism of modern methods in evangelism has left no possible means of bringing a whole congregation to a point of decision, the following suggestions are offered, which have proven useful.

The real value of public methods may be secured and many evils avoided if, after explaining the way of life and during a season of silent prayer, the unsaved are asked to accept Christ by a conscious act of the will, directed in definite silent prayer to God. Such a decision may then be greatly strengthened by an immediate public confession of Christ. The vital difference in question is, however, that such are then confessing that they have believed on Christ, rather than making a confession in order that they may be saved. After such an appeal, an opportunity should be made for personal conversation with any who believe they have accepted Christ by faith, or any others who may have honest difficulties. In this conversation the individual's exact understanding of the step may be ascertained and his faith strengthened. Such conversations may be secured early in an after-meeting, or by offering some attractive literature suited to beginners in the Christian life. When it is clear that an intelligent decision has been made, constant confession of Christ as a personal Saviour, should be urged along with the other duties and privileges of the new life.

MESSAGES.—In considering messages as the last of the three "false forces" in evangelism already mentioned, it may well be restated that the ministry of the New Testament evangelist was intended to be wider in its scope than the accepted mission of the evangelist of to-day. As his name implies, he is the "bearer of glad tidings," and so is in marked

contrast to the prophet who proclaims the great principles of morality and righteousness. He has also a far different mission than the pastor and teacher who shepherds the flock and feeds them on the Word of God.

The New Testament evangelist is given a particular message to proclaim. That message is the "good news" of the Gospel of Grace; it is therefore a distinct body of truth for this age. His evangel is one of "glad tidings," because it offers freedom from the bondage of the law, with attempts at self-fitting for the presence of God, and because it proclaims a perfect salvation by the power of God through faith in Jesus Christ and His redemption by the cross—a salvation through which God by His power produces a "new creature," able, because of the new life imparted, to bring forth fruit to His glory.

Any deviation from this prescribed message of redemptive truth is an unwarranted undertaking on the part of the evangelist, and is fraught with grave dangers. On the one hand, he may be tempted to adopt the message of the prophet; or he may undertake the work of the pastor and teacher and deal with matters of Christian living, and thus encumber the glorious but limited message of the evangelist. For the issue before the unsaved is not one of after-conduct. The life to be led after conversion can be determined only by the individual himself in the light and power of the new relation to Christ, Whom he has received, and the manner of that new life is a personal matter

between the Christian and his Lord (Rom. xiv. 4). Yet, when dealing with the unsaved, the questions which belong to Christian living, such as forms of amusement, or even church membership, are often discussed by evangelists, and these issues may become conditions of salvation to those who hear. The individual may be willing to accept Christ, but be wholly unable to see beyond that one step until that one step is taken.

Again, a message may become a "false force" and, to some extent, a hindrance in true evangelism, through a common tendency to depend upon it to move the unsaved to decision. Only the Spirit of God can illuminate the vision and convict the heart of its sinfulness; and while the Spirit may use the message to that end, the work is His and His alone.

The divine plan in saving men provides that the Gospel of the saving grace of Christ is to be clearly presented to them. As they hear, some will believe, and when they believe they will that instant be saved by the mighty power of God (John 3:36). There is little demand for methods beyond this God-given program. It is doubtless important to discover and follow up every decision. Simple methods often help to this end; but such machinery is no part of the plan God has ordained. The unsaved are expected to *believe* the message of salvation as they hear it. Failure is too often in the preaching. The messenger should *know* the Gospel, or else be silent.

The real purpose of the message and the utter

impossibility of its possessing convicting power in and of itself will be more fully stated in another chapter, when dealing with the illuminating work of the Spirit as one of the true forces in the evangelism of the New Testament.

In considering the true forces in evangelism as they are set forth in the Scriptures, it will be found that they, in contrast with the "false forces" already mentioned, depend upon the activity of the whole company of believers in prayer and in the ministry of the Word; that they demand an unceasing effort for their fullest realization; and that they, from necessity, must usually be carried on independently of public gatherings or special leaders. These true forces in evangelism will, for the sake of emphasis, be taken up in their reverse order; beginning with the objective, or end, which true evangelism must have in view, and tracing the successive steps backward to the real point of human responsibility.