

THE PASTOR'S MESSAGE

WHY STAGGER AT THE PROMISE?

By F. A. Anderson

In the twelfth chapter of Genesis it is recorded that God said to Abraham: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee." To this command He added a promise. "And I will make of thee a great nation." Although Abraham had no children when this promise was made, it is plain he must have before the promise could be fulfilled. In the seventeenth chapter of the same book, the fifteenth and sixteenth verses God plainly promised Abraham a son. The fulfillment of this promise seemed impossible, seeing Abraham was a hundred years old, and Sarah ninety when the promise was made, yet Paul says, Rom. 4:2, "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God."

There are a great many promises in the Word that, considered from a human point of view, are fully as staggering as that made to Abraham, but none are seemingly more impossible than those that promise holiness to man. Can that heart which Jeremiah declares is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, be made pure in the sight of God? God declares in His Word it can, and promises holiness to His people, and the promise should not stagger us.

Holiness is our greatest need. All of the promises of God to Abraham were made possible by the fulfillment of the promise of a son; even so all of the promises for the future for the child of God depend on the fulfillment of the promise of heart purity. Without a pure heart we cannot ascend into the hill of the Lord, nor stand in His holy place (see Psa. 24:4). Without it we shall not see God. (See Matt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14). And while it doth not yet appear what we shall be, we know that at His appearing we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. "And," says John, "every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."

All agree there will be nothing in heaven that is not holy. All the symbols used by the Revelator to picture heaven to us suggests purity; gates of pearl, streets of pure gold, the crystal sea, the white throne, an innumerable host of redeemed men and women robed in white declare heaven a place of purity and holiness.

If then man is to be pure in heart in heaven, he must be made pure in heart somewhere between the time of birth and the time he enters that city. Some tell us that at, or after death this work is done. If that is true we do not need to worry, but before we go further let us get the Word beneath our feet so as to stand on the promises of God, and not on the theories of man.

Paul says, II. Cor. 6:2: "Behold now is the day of salvation." Surely all will agree that this is spoken of the salvation of the soul, and that the cleansing or entire sanctification of the heart is a part of that salvation since it is necessary if we are to "see God."

Notice Paul is using the word "day" here not of a twenty-four hour period of time, but of a dispensation. This dispensation in which we live is in a peculiar sense "the day of salvation" since the great event which fulfilled the day of the law and prophets, and marked the beginning of the day of Grace, makes pos-

sible the salvation of the soul. The salvation of the people of the Old Testament would have been impossible without the events of the New, for their sacrifices would have been in vain, had it not been for the sacrifice of the Lamb of God on Calvary, which event, together with the birth of Christ and Pentecost, marks the dawn of our Day. The birth of Christ was the first ray of light which shone in the east to mark our day, but the full light of the day had not come until the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of pentecost.

For the individual the "day" Paul speaks of begins and ends with this life. When we awake at the sound of the trump of God, and the dead in Christ rise, a new day will have dawned, a new dispensation will have been ushered in.

Let us notice that the work God undertakes in any day is finished in that day. The work may be done, and usually is, in stages, but the first and last part of the work begun is finished in that day. In the day of creation we see a work of seven stages, each complete in itself, which make up that day, and since the Lord viewed the work of that creative day, and declared it was very good, nothing has ever been added to that work. Scientists change the arrangements of the atoms of one substance and cause them to form another, but the atoms were in existence since the end of the creative day. Man can improve the species, or should we not rather say adapt the species to some new purpose, for to improve it for one purpose may spoil it for another, but there has been no new species since the statement of God about His work, "It was very good."

Now let us consider the day of God's revelation to man—a longer day than the day of creation, but made up of stages, each more perfect than the last. A day which began when God began to reveal His will to the conscience of man. Later in the day of revelation the law was given, written on tablets of stone, and then He revealed Himself in Christ. God incarnate in the flesh. But when John the beloved closed the book of Revelation, with the words, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen," the day ended and no new revelations of God has been made. True He reveals Himself to man today, but only through the revelations already made.

Again we repeat, when a day ends the work of that day ceases, because it is complete. When the day of the Son's visible presence on earth ended ten days before Pentecost, He ascended to the Father to be seen no more by the eye of flesh until our bodies are transformed at His coming.

If the statements before made of the day of creation, the day of revelation, the day of the Son's visible presence on the earth are true, and we believe they are, does it not seem reasonable that the same holds good of the day of salvation, and when that day ends for us, which it does at death, the work of the soul's salvation ends. How then will our hearts be made pure after the day of salvation ends, since it is a part of the soul's salvation?

Another would tell us that while the heart must be purified by faith in order to see God and enjoy heaven, it is done at regeneration, and add to prove that statement, God does not do an imperfect work. The statement that God does not do an imperfect work is true, but that the heart is purified at regeneration does not stand the test of Scripture, so there must be something wrong somewhere. Let us examine the statement.

John the Baptist demanded of the candidates he baptized that they bring forth fruit meet for repentance. In other words that they repent, and their lives show the fruit of repentance. Now if a person repents and believes in Christ the Son of God, it seems to me they must surely be justified in His sight. Some of John's disciples, whom we have already noticed must have repented, later became Apostles of Christ. (See John 1:35-42). Certainly they believed on Christ, for Peter declared in answer to a question addressed to the twelve, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matt. 16:16. Christ Himself declared of the Apostle in His prayer in Jn. 17: "They are not of the world," and a person who is not regenerated is. Surely it seems they enjoyed an experience of regeneration, or justification, while Christ was with them, yet we find Peter later definitely links the cleansing of their hearts with the Baptism of the Holy Ghost at pentecost. In Acts 15:8, 9, Peter is speaking of his visit to Cornelius home, and says, "And God, which knoweth the hearts, bear them witness, giving unto them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." Is it not plain then from Peter's statement the Apostles' hearts were cleansed, or purified at pentecost, when they received the Holy Ghost?

Is it accusing God of only doing an imperfect work at regeneration to say the heart is not cleansed then, but at the time the individual is baptized with the Holy Ghost? No, we have already noticed that the work of God done in the different days, was done by several stages, each complete in itself, so also is the work of salvation in the individual heart, in their "day of salvation." The work of salvation although provisionally completed at Calvary actually begins in the individual when justifying faith grips the promise of God for forgiveness of sins. The preparation for the individual salvation of a soul begins when God speaks to the heart, and convicts of sin. Conviction is a part of the preparation of the heart for salvation, for without conviction who will turn from sin? and as a part of the preparation of the heart it is complete, but it is not all of the preparation necessary. Before salvation can be enjoyed conviction must be followed by repentance and repentance by faith, then, and only then, God does the work of regeneration, and the guilty past is blotted out by the Blood of the Lamb. Conviction, repentance, faith and regeneration are all separate yet complete acts, performed by God or the individual, and figure in the salvation of the soul.

When the regenerated child of God realizes that in that regenerated heart there is still the sin principle that could not be forgiven because it is a condition and not an act of the individual, yet a condition that caused every act of sin which the individual committed, and sees that God is as faithful and just to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, as He is to forgive us our sins, and cries out to God for that cleansing, God will as completely cleanse the heart as He did forgive the sins.

Beloved, let us not stagger at the promise of God through unbelief, but rather be strong in faith, and by our faith in His promise give glory to God, and enjoy our inheritance in Him.

A pound of example is worth a ton of advice.