

THE GOSPEL OF THE CAMP MEETING

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While we read of one-day "camp meetings" being held in some centers here in England during the early days of Primitive Methodism, yet the camp meeting as we know it today is essentially an American institution. Paul Rees told me one day that it was built around the old days of pioneering. Here, for example, is Everek R. Storms, writing of his denomination's early-day camp meetings, in his recently-published *History of the United Missionary Church*: "...it continued for ten days. There were nineteen tents, and an estimated three thousand people attended each Sunday. From far and near they came by hundreds in farm wagons, surreys, buggies, and on foot. Some thirty-five ministers were present, some coming from Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Ontario. In addition to the regular ministers of the church, there were twenty-four preachers in attendance from nine other denominations."

As to the message proclaimed from the camp-meeting platform, it was the old-time message of salvation full and free, with its call to repentance, then holiness of life. "The gathering by far exceeded the expectations of the people," says Brother Storms, "many being converted and others sanctified wholly. Holiness was the main theme, and it was reported that many entered into the higher life, or the blessed state of sanctification..."

Regeneration

The message of the camp meeting today starts with the evangel of regeneration. The new birth, its necessity and provision, is the structure on which the camp meeting message is built. Regeneration is that work of grace which God performs in the heart when He pardons the sinner for his sins, blots out his guilty past, and makes him a new creature. "Old things (then) pass away, and all things (then) become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

An Inbred Malady

Regeneration brings in its wake a power over outward and even inward sin. But sin is an inbred malady, a virus, and so is still present in the believer's heart, manifesting itself in and through the believer's life. Rarely conscious of this vital fact is the new convert at the time, but in due course he recognizes the warfare within, testifies to a life of spiritual defeat, and pants for "something better." More often than not the language of Romans 7 becomes his heart cry, "Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me...?"

Bishop Foster wrote: "Sin committed and depravity felt are very different. The one is an action, the other a state of the affections. The regenerate believer is saved from the one, and has grace to enable him to have victory over the other, but the disposition itself to some extent remains, under the control of a stronger gracious power implanted, but still making resistance and indicating actual presence, and needing to be entirely sanctified."

Not for one minute would we minimize the wonder of converting grace. John's baptism, after all, was one of repentance unto the remission of sins. The believers at Ephesus were truly born again, though they knew little of the power of God in their lives. Many who make up the congregations of our churches week by week, and attend the camp meeting year by year, are most surely numbered among the great company who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They know

Christ as Saviour, and we dare not deny it. Many of them are being greatly used by Him in service. But there is something missing, for they are like Peter and the other disciples before the day of Pentecost. Born again, they still know nothing of Pentecost in their own lives.

Sin is suspended and not destroyed at conversion. Traitors lurk within the citadel of mansoul, and soon manifest their presence. The branches of the old life may have been "lopped off" at conversion, but their roots remain, and the fruit soon evidences the fact. There is therefore a need for a purging away of the root of sin, a cleansing of the heart from its secret springs.

Entire Sanctification

God's remedy lies in the blessing of entire sanctification. "The body of sin may be done away," says Romans 6:6. The God of peace can sanctify wholly.

Now it is only half truth if we explain the Bible word "sanctify" as meaning mere separation, and dedication to Christ's service. In the Old Testament, as well as in the New, sanctification implies inward purification. Hezekiah, at the dedication of the Temple after the evil reign of Ahaz, ordered a thorough cleansing of the building. "The priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord, to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness" that they had found within. The New Testament evangel also speaks of a "cleansing from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). We also are bidden to cleanse ourselves "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2 Cor. 7:1). We cleanse ourselves, of course—not through any workings or merits of our own, but through our appropriating of the provisions that God in grace has provided. "Sanctify them though thy word," comes in our Lord's high-priestly prayer (John 17:17), you will remember, and it was spoken concerning His own inner circle of followers.

Asa Mahan said that the word "sanctify" was a combination of two words, "all" and "perfection." "Through and through," says Luther; while John Wesley's notes on the New Testament give us the phrase, "every part of you perfectly." "Complete and sound in every part," has also been put forward by two more recent expositors. The term "entire sanctification" is therefore most appropriate.

Paul addressed those gathered at the "camp meeting" in ancient Thessalonica as those who had "turned to God from idols." In chapter one of the first letter you can find thirteen proofs that they had been really born again. They are now assured that the grace of God which had saved them from their sins could likewise deliver them from inbred sin; that the downpull of depravity could be conquered by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. "God, which knoweth the hearts of all men...bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit...purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8, 9). That, said the apostle Peter, is what the Lord had done in his own heart on the first day of Pentecost, and what He had also performed in the hearts of certain Gentile believers.

Fullness of Life

Many Christians are like hospital patients—while they have life, they lack the fullness of life that Christ came to impart. Of the impotent man who was healed outside the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, Peter said: "By faith in Christ's name, hath his name made this man whole... the faith which is through him hath given him this perfect soundness..." Entire sanctification is this spiritual soundness or wholeness. "Wilt thou therefore he made whole?" That is the challenge still of the camp meeting's message.

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