

The First Crisis of Redemption

by Charles Ewing Brown

Charles Ewing Brown preaches about the historical shift in the understanding of salvation from sin within Christianity, highlighting the apostolic belief in salvation from sin and sinning in the present world. The sermon discusses the gradual lowering of standards over time, leading to the belief that salvation is a future hope rather than a present reality. It emphasizes the importance of returning to the apostolic teaching that salvation is freedom from sin experienced in the current life, as advocated by scholars like Arminius and Wesley.

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Transcript

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necessary for salvation?" a: "Yes, crisis is necessary for salvation, as it involves a turning point in a person's life and a change in their relationship with God." - q: "What is imputation?" a: "Imputation refers to the idea that God imputes the consequences of Adam's sin to humanity, not guilt, but the consequences of sin." - q: "What is the relationship between justification and regeneration?" a: "Justification refers to the outward change in a person's relationship with God, while regeneration refers to the inward change in a person's heart and soul." - q: "Is regeneration necessary for salvation?" a: "Yes, regeneration is necessary for a person to be born again and see the kingdom of God." quotes: - "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe." - "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." - "We have said that each transgression of the law of God, on the part of a responsible moral agent, both condemns and pollutes his soul." applicationPoints: - "Crisis is a turning point in a person's life where they make a choice for good or evil." - "Justification by faith is a crisis experience that involves a change in a person's relationship with God." - "Regeneration is necessary for a person to be born again and see the kingdom of God." keywords: - "crisis" - "justification" - "regeneration" - "imputation" - "salvation" - "faith" - "God" - "humanity" - "sin" - "atonement" ---

Naturalistic interpretations of religion tend to stress the gradual nature of the work of grace in the life of man. This has a great show of rationality as we can easily see that the operations of the laws of nature are gradual in their process. But believers in spiritual religion stress the crisis experiences of the human soul for the very reason that herein most especially does the life of mankind differ from the necessary course of nature. It is this difference which naturalistic teachers seek to obscure and explain away, whereas those who believe in a personal God and in the unique character of the human soul, its freedom and its special personal relationship to God, must emphasize crisis experiences in religion as being most consistent with the spiritual nature of man.

We believe it is possible to defend the idea that there are no crises in nature. The things which seem like crises are not such, strictly speaking, but merely analogies of the crises of human life. One might argue that an explosion which fires a gun, for example, is a real example of crisis in the natural world. Before the explosion all the factors involved are perfectly at rest, without any tension whatsoever. An old loaded cartridge will lie unchanged for a whole lifetime and then explode suddenly if properly handled. Is not that explosion a true example of crisis? To this the answer is, no. All the factors which contributed to the explosion, except the trivial shock which set it off, were in a perfectly orderly arrangement and each element did exactly what the laws of nature indicated, at the very instant that the spark touched them. There was no creative moment of choice; there was only the orderly fulfillment of the inexorable law. This is not a crisis; it is simply the analogy of a crisis, such as can happen only in the soul of a human being.

Take, for example, the crisis in the life of a man who becomes a murderer. Previous to the decisive act there arises a tremendous tension of emotion in the mind of the man who regards himself as having suffered injury or as being exposed to such a danger. Instead of having only one choice like the elements in the gunpowder, he has a number of choices besides that of doing murder. In the tension of the moment, murder is the choice he makes. This is the meaning of crisis: that at one dramatic moment in a man's life he will make a choice for evil or for good, or perhaps even a choice in temporal matters involving no moral element, but a choice which must inevitably mold all his future and impose limitations on all his later range of choices.

Think of a few of these crises in the natural life of a man: the decision to go to college, the decision to follow a certain trade or profession, the decision to marry a certain person. In addition to these, there are certain moral crises in the life of men. There is the decisive step when a man decides to give up drinking or when a trusted employee decides to resist or to yield to temptation to dishonesty. No one can deny that such crises as these make and shape the destiny of men. We contend that it is as unlikely that a man should be saved and become a Christian without experiencing a crisis in his life as that a man should enter the bonds of matrimony without passing through any life crisis. We grant that some people may accept the state of matrimony with such complete assent of the mind that they are perhaps not conscious of any emotional tension, but that is not the point. Such an experience is a crisis, regardless of the state of one's mind.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

The crisis which ushers a man into the state of Salvation is only one single experience entered into by the whole man, but to change the figure, it might be thought of as a great palace with many different approaches. The palace cannot fully be understood without viewing each of its different sides. Likewise, in religious language the experience of salvation is called "justification by faith," "forgiveness of sins," "conversion, regeneration," "adoption," "redemption," and possibly by other names, depending upon the viewpoint which one takes in studying its nature. It is important to remember that these are not several gifts of God which come to us through different doors of our heart, but they are many phases of one experience of the grace of God, instantaneously bestowed in the supreme crisis of human life.

Justification by faith describes the legal, or judicial, side of the change which happens to a man when his sins are forgiven. It is the change which takes place in the mind of God as judge, by which a man's sins are pardoned and he is no longer accounted a sinner. This is what it means to be justified by faith and have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe . . . being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God . . . Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:21-28).

The law is holy and just and good (Rom. 7:12). If it were possible for any man to keep it in his natural state, that fact would be a complete justification for that man, but it is the unyielding contention of Paul and of the other New Testament writers that in his own natural strength no man can keep this law. Therefore the righteousness of the law can never avail to justify any man. "To him that worketh not," says Paul, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness' (Rom. 4:5). Then we read of the man to whom God imputeth righteousness without works (vs. 6). "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (vs. 8). "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (vss. 23-24).

This doctrine of imputation here and elsewhere in the Roman letter has been taken to mean that Christ's personal righteousness is imputed to us. This is of a piece with the theory that the guilt of Adam's sin has been transferred to the whole race. Such ideas revolt the conscience of modern men; to think that an unborn child should be guilty of a sin which Adam committed is an impossible strain on the minds of most intelligent men. To "impute" means to account or reckon. Men often make mistakes in their reckoning, but

God never reckons anything to be so, nor accounts anything to be true, unless it is really true. There are three forms of imputation in the Epistle to the Romans. There is first the imputation of the consequences of Adam's sins upon the human race; second, the imputation of the consequences and penalty of the sin of the human race upon Christ; and third, the imputation of the consequences of Christ's atoning passion upon all that believe. It is important to distinguish the difference between the penalty and the consequences. A man may be a quarrelsome, brawling person. In a fight he gets his hand injured for life. For that brawl the judge sentences him to jail for six months. The jail sentence is a penalty for that sin and the life-long crippling of his hand is a consequence of that sin. The judge could suspend the penalty, but he could not suspend the consequences. Because the man has lost the use of one hand he is impoverished; his children grow up in a poverty-stricken neighborhood, lacking many advantages. All these are consequences of that one sin. His children do not bear the guilt of that sin, but they do suffer the consequences, and such was the result of the sin of Adam upon the human race. To deny that good people can suffer the consequences of the wrongdoing of evil people, although not their guilt, is to deny what our eyes witness every day: the suffering of the innocent, because of the evildoing of the wicked, such as that of parents or children or near relatives.

Justification is not, therefore, the imputation of the personal righteousness of Christ any more than the imputation of Adam's sin to mankind is an imputation of the guilt of his transgression. The atonement of Christ redeems us from the consequences of Adam's sin and from the guilt of our own. Its benefits are imputed to us when we trust in God's saving grace in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Forgiveness of sins is only another description of justification by faith. Paul delighted in exalting this glorious experience. Sometimes he describes it as "being united with Christ" in his death and in his resurrection. (See the sixth chapter of Romans.) The mystical union of the Christian with Christ must not be thought of as an identification of our person with his. This is the teaching of classical mysticism. It would mean the destruction of human personality. Paul makes his meaning clear when in another case he describes marriage as creating a unity of the persons married (Eph. 5:31). We all know that the husband and wife do not lose their personalities. As long as they live, and throughout eternity, each will be a separate individual. Nevertheless, they do experience a peculiar state of unity, requiring perfect faith and love for its ideal fulfillment. In the same chapter Paul describes our union with Christ as being analogous to that of a husband and wife to each other. Elsewhere the Apostle writes of "Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (I Cor. 1:30). By his indwelling grace Christ imparts the spiritual fruits of his own supernatural life. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22-23a). Undoubtedly these are the result of the indwelling Christ, who dwells in the heart by faith (Eph. 3:17). We assert as strongly as possible the necessity and reality of this impartation of spiritual life to the soul. What we deny is that Christ's personal righteousness becomes a substitute for holy living and godly behavior in the saints. The righteousness of Christ which is thus imputed to them is the effect of Christ's atoning passion granted to them as a gift on condition of faith.

The old-time Wesleyan preachers taught that there were four types of justification, each restricted to a definite period of a man's life. "In considering this subject," writes Bishop S. M. Merrill, "we must remember that there are several distinct justifications taught in the Scriptures. The first is the 'free gift,' which, through the righteousness of one, 'came upon all men unto justification of life.' This is generally called the initial or infantile justification as it includes the entire human family, placing them in a state of freedom from condemnation and starting them in life exempt from liability to punishment, either for the sin of Adam or for

their own inherited evil nature. The second is the justification of the sinner in the sense of pardon and personal acceptance. This is the justification in question, which is by faith only. The third is the justification of the righteous, in the sense of approval. This is by works, or obedience as a result of a living faith. The fourth has respect to the transactions of the day of judgment. At that time men will be justified or condemned according to their works. The reason of this final justification of the righteous will not be found in themselves, but in the Savior as its source; nevertheless, the decision will be according to the deeds done in the body, or upon the testimony of works as the fruit of faith." [40] This distinction may be useful to some by helping to explain a multitude of texts dealing with the various aspects of justification if we bear in mind that for the sinner seeking Christ there is no justification except justification by faith as a free and unmerited pardon granted as a gift from God.

THE CONDITIONAL JUSTIFICATION OF CHILDREN

It is the teaching of the New Testament that the atonement of Christ was made on behalf of all men: "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). "Therefore as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom. 5:18).

It is perfectly proper to ask what this atonement means in the case of infants. Christ said of little children that "of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:14); "except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (18:3). Nevertheless, as we have shown elsewhere, complete justification is everywhere offered on the term of voluntary acceptance by faith. Men are exhorted to seek for it as for a hidden treasure. They are required to repent and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22). Inasmuch as little children cannot meet these requirements, the question arises as to their standing under the atonement.

We believe that all infants are conditionally justified under the atonement. That is, they are offered justification on condition that they accept it in accordance with its normal obligations as soon as they reach the age of accountability. However, if they die before reaching that age the benefits of the atonement, including regeneration, justification, and entire sanctification, fall to them as a gift of the grace of God which they have never rejected and which they receive because they die passive under the atonement. To say that infants are fully justified and regenerated merely by reason of the fact that they are infants is just as unreasonable as to say that they are wholly sanctified for the same reason. Nobody teaches that children are wholly sanctified by reason of their infantile innocence, and by the same reasoning we dare not say that they are justified and regenerated in the complete, definite sense of adult believers. But they are conditionally justified under the grace of the atonement so that they will receive the full benefits of that atonement if they die passive under the atonement without ever rejecting it. If they live, however, to exercise their option they must accept justification, regeneration and entire sanctification voluntarily, under the terms of the gospel, if they are ever consciously to enjoy the full privileges of this expression of the grace of God. They are like the heirs under a conditional will containing the option of a choice when they reach the legal age. No one can foresee what option these heirs will choose. They may even reject the will entirely, but until they come of an age to choose their option they are heirs under the will.

REGENERATION

The term "justification" refers to something outward or objective which is done for man by the judicial sentence of pardon for remission of his sins, while "regeneration" refers to the corresponding work of grace by which his heart is changed. It is the consistent teaching of Scripture and the well-nigh universal belief of the representative teachers of Christianity that sin exists in two forms: as acts of disobedience on the one hand and as a state of nonconformity to God's ideal and perfect will on the other. In the very nature of the case this distinction is bound to make confusion in the thinking of the uninstructed and the careless. Nevertheless, no intelligent person can ponder the matter very long without seeing that there is indeed a connection and yet a difference between sinful acts and a tendency to sin. It is at this point that this confusion arises over the formation of a definition of regeneration. Many theologians define regeneration in such a way as to include entire sanctification, although most of them concede, and even assert, that regeneration is not the completion of entire sanctification and at the best cannot be more than the beginning of that experience. If we lower the standard of regeneration too far we shall make the mistake of confusing the church and the world. Nevertheless, if we raise it too high we shall find that we are describing a state of entire sanctification, which the experience of regenerated believers and the teaching of the Word of God will not sustain. "With respect to regeneration," writes Dr. R. H. Foster, "that is a work done in us, in the way of changing our inward nature; a work by which a spiritual life is unused into the soul, whereby he (the regenerate) brings forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness, has victory over sin, is enabled to resist corrupt tendencies, and has peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; a radical change by which the preponderating tendencies of the soul are turned toward God, whereas they were previously turned from him -- by which the love of sin is destroyed, its dominion broken, and a desire and relish for and longing after holiness implanted." [41]

"We have said that each transgression of the law of God, on the part of a responsible moral agent, both condemns and pollutes his soul. No doubt of this truth has ever been expressed by any intelligent Christian. Each sinner is responsible for the guilt and pollution thus brought on himself. God cannot approve him as his child till both the one and the other are swept away by atoning blood. It is therefore quite as important that the pollution of his sins should be cleansed, as their guilt should be forgiven. The internal cleansing is the counterpart of pardon from without, and one is just as perfect as the other. To illustrate: if a sinner has committed just forty thousand sins, he is responsible to God for the guilt and pollution of just forty thousand sins; no more, no less. In the act of pardon, the guilt of forty thousand sins is completely forgiven; no more -- no less. In the cleansing work of regeneration the pollution of just forty thousand sins is completely washed away; no more, no less. The work of pardon is, therefore, infinite in its application to past sins; and the work of cleansing equally." [42]

Sometimes the doctrine of regeneration is so interpreted as to signify that the very structure and existence of the soul is annihilated and the man's existence as a human being begins all over again. To press these figures of speech to such an extreme is to deny other truths fully as important. If God annihilates the man who was a sinner in the experience of regeneration, why might he not annihilate other men without starting them over again? Undoubtedly spiritual truth must always be understood by the medium of parables or figures of speech. To strain them to a point of absurdity by making them literal is to destroy their spiritual meaning. That is what Christ's hearers did when they rejected his teachings because they thought he meant that they were to turn cannibals and eat his physical flesh with their literal teeth (John 6:35-66). This same obstacle stumbled Nicodemus in regard to the very question we are discussing, namely, being born again. Nicodemus took it literally, as we are in danger of doing. Nearly all the leading authorities describe this experience of regeneration as being an impartation of divine life to the soul, and this is in harmony with the Scriptures. Probably evangelical Christians have focused the most of their attention upon Christ's

famous figure of the new birth in his teaching to Nicodemus: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). And this is an important scripture to remember in all teaching concerning regeneration.

It is, however, just as important to remember that regeneration is often described as a reception by the soul of something imparted or implanted by God. The famous Parable of the Sower in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew is an illustration of this truth. The soil receives the seed, which grows because it is hospitably received. This is the "engrafted word, which is able to save your soul" (Jas. 1:21). "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). It is Christ formed in you (Gal. 4:19). This is what it means to become partakers of the divine nature (II Pet. 1:4). Paul exhorts us to "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24). And he says that the Colossians have put on the new man (Col. 3:10). It is an experience in which we who were dead in sin are quickened together with Christ (Eph. 2:5). "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26). "I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart" (Jer. 24:7). These are all examples of an implantation of grace or blessing into the being of the man. The same thought is borne out in the following verse: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:33-34). "I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes ... and they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezek. 11:19-20).

We believe these instances are sufficient to show that it is not contrary to the tenor of Scripture to describe regeneration as an impartation of a new life into the soul. Bearing this thought in mind, we turn to other figures describing this tremendous crisis which changes a worldly person into a child of God. Christ said: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). John explains: "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12-13). Christ described this as the birth of the Spirit (3:3-7). "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Pet 1:3).

ADOPTION

While the other writers of the New Testament frequently describe the new life of salvation under the figure of a new birth, Paul uses that expression only once: "the washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5). Many writers refer this to baptism, but having in mind the Jewish background of the Apostle Paul it is evident that he was thinking of the laver which stood at the door of the Tabernacle (Exod. 40:7), between the Tabernacle and the altar (30:18). Undoubtedly Paul meant to connect this laver of cleansing with the altar where sacrifice was made for sin. The Tabernacle was a type of the church and all Christians are priests (I Pet. 2:5-9), but no priest could enter the Tabernacle until he had first passed the altar and washed in the laver (Exod. 30:20): "When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not."

Paul, being enamored of his Roman citizenship, illustrates regeneration by the figure of adoption, as adoption was a common ceremony under Roman law. It is likely that his own family came into Roman citizenship by that process, therefore he writes to the Roman Christians: "Ye have received the Spirit of

adoption" (Rom. 8:15). God hath sent forth his son "to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4:5-7).

This adoption was not a mere casual thought in the mind of God, but a deep purpose running through eternity: "He has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself" (Eph. 1:4-5). It is the firm conviction of all Wesleyan theologians that this predestination is the predetermined purpose of God to have a people, likewise his purpose to present the gospel for acceptance or rejection by whosoever will. It is an election of opportunity, and not an election of unreasoning fate. This adoption is the admission of those who were strangers and foreigners into the full rights and privileges of the sons of God. It takes those who were children of their father, the devil, and transfers them into the kingdom of God's dear Son and makes them no longer "strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19).

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

In all his dealings with the churches of his time, Paul never prays for the forgiveness of their sins; he constantly assumes that the Christians to whom he writes are saved from sin and that they are fully assured and clearly conscious of that fact. These Christians "have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:15-16). This is a conviction created in the heart by the Holy Spirit, assuring the soul of forgiveness and acceptance with God. For he has "sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). This assurance is experienced because "we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

Freedom from bondage and freedom from fear are marks of the indwelling power of the Spirit which gives the assurance of salvation. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself" (I John 5:10). This is the Spirit that beareth witness. In addition to the witness of God's Spirit, there is the witness of our own spirit. "And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God" (I John 3:19-21). The Apostle Paul knew himself to be clear in his conscience for "our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience" (II Cor. 1:12). And again he says: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also, bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 9:1).

Part of the witness of our own spirit is the peace of God: "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Ps. 119:165). "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1). We have the kingdom of God within us (Luke 17:21). And, "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17). "The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing" (15:13). "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). On account of these things, we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (I John 3:14). "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1).

It must be remembered that these spiritual privileges are enjoyed in different degrees by every Christian. That is to say, the witness of the Spirit is the same to all just as the sun is the same to all, but as some people have better eyesight to benefit by the light of the sun, so some Christians are more spiritual and thus better able to appropriate these privileges of the assurance of salvation.

It would be a pity if this doctrine, meant to sustain and comfort the hearts of the saints, should be misinterpreted so as to become a burden instead of a consolation. This gracious witness of the Spirit should not be confused with the varying and changing tides of human emotion. As the poet has said:

The tides of emotion may dim as they will,
The Son and the Father abide with me still
I dare not confide in
a rapturous frame,
But trust in the promise, forever the same.

And an unshaken faith is the prime necessity for the making of this promise fruitful to the soul.

THE CHRISTIAN IS SAVED FROM SIN

If Christians used the same common sense in discussing salvation that they use in talking about other things, there never could arise the question, What is the thing from which a saved person is saved? and yet, strange as it may seem, the vast mass of Christians, both lay people and teachers, regard it as a closed question. Saved people are not saved from anything, according to the popular belief. In any case, they are not saved from sin, because it is said that all men sin. And one might even say that Christians sin worse than other men because they have more light and more privileges. They are more sensitive to the light against which they constantly sin. So we have the strange paradox which maintains that the better Christian the man is, the bigger sinner he will think himself to be. And they tell us that the greatest saint of the New Testament was Paul, who confessed himself "the chief of sinners." This is not the kind of paradox often found in the Bible which represents only a seeming contradiction that can be resolved by understanding both sides of the question. Instead, this is the kind of double talk which makes worldly people scoff at Christianity as being unreasonable and absurd.

But such was not the teaching of the ancient church. Ignatius, A.D. 30-107, lived at such an early age that there was a tradition that he was the infant whom Christ took up and blessed (Matt. 18:2). Ignatius continued the New Testament teaching against sinning Christianity. After stressing faith and love, he writes: "All other things which are requisite for the holy life follow after them. No man (truly) making a profession of faith sinneth; nor does he that possesses love hate anyone. The tree is made manifest by its fruit; so those that profess themselves to be Christians shall be recognized by their conduct. For there is not now a demand for mere profession, but that a man be found continuing in the power of faith to the end." [43] Justin Martyr, A.D. 110-165, was a converted heathen philosopher who gave his life as a martyr for Christ after a long and faithful ministry of Christian missionary work. He writes: "But there is no other (way) than this -- to become acquainted with this Christ, to be washed in the fountain spoken of by Isaiah for the remission of sins; and for the rest, to live sinless lives." [44] The same writer also says: "And let those who are not found living as He taught, be understood to be no Christians, even though they profess with the lip the precepts of Christ." [45] Testimony of this kind from the Fathers of the primitive church could be multiplied indefinitely, but one will not find much help in such research from the older scholars because most of them were influenced by dogmatic bias which prevented their sorting out and emphasizing these passages. Modern critical scholars, however, have been quick to see and admit that the ancient church believed and taught a sinless life as a standard for its membership.

Dr. Adolph Harnack is undoubtedly the greatest Protestant church historian since the days of Neander. He writes: "The baptized person must remain pure, or (as 2 Clement, e. g., puts it) 'keep the seal pure and intact.' " [46] In the same volume Harnack writes: "Justin, however, declares that baptism is only for those who have actually ceased to sin." [47] Continuing in the same volume the writer explains how the standard was let down. Referring to the Christians of that time he says: "The three characteristic titles, however, are those of 'saints,' 'brethren,' and 'the church of God,' all of which hang together. The abandonment of the term 'disciples' for these self-chosen titles marks the most significant advance made by those who believed in Jesus They took the name of 'saints,' because they were sanctified by God and for God through the Holy Spirit sent by Jesus, and because they were conscious of being truly holy and partakers in the future glory ... It [saints] remains the technical term applied by Christians to one another till after the middle of the second century; thereafter it gradually disappears, as Christians had no longer the courage to call themselves 'saints,' after all that had happened. Besides, what really distinguished Christians from one another by this time was the difference between the clergy and the laity (or the leaders and the led), so that the name 'saints' became quite obliterated; it was only recalled in hard times of persecution. In its place, 'Holy orders' arose (martyrs, confessors, ascetics, and finally -- during the third century -- the bishops), while 'holy media' (sacraments), whose fitful influence covered Christians who were personally unholy, assumed still greater prominence than in the first century. People were no longer conscious of being personally holy, but then they had holy martyrs, holy ascetics, holy priests, holy ordinances, holy writings, and a holy doctrine." [48]

The same author in his famous History of Dogma writes: "Because Christendom is a community of saints which has in its midst the sure salvation, all its members -- this is the necessary inference -- must lead a sinless life." [49] The famous New Testament scholar, Dr. Johannes Weiss, writes: "Nothing is more remote from the Apostle's [Paul's] purpose than the fostering of confession of sins. The great confession of human sinfulness in Romans 7:14-25 is not that of a Christian; here is a condition of things which have been conquered." [50] "Certainly, according to Paul's conception, the true spiritual Christian in whom the Spirit is everything and the flesh is nonexistent, cannot sin." [51] In fact, we can trace the exact point where the doctrine that all Christians must sin first entered the church. Windisch says that Origen (d. A.D. 254) legitimized the position of sinners in the church.

This amazing change of spiritual climate and attitude from the days of the apostolic church to our own time is well set forth by Dr. Arthur Cushman McGiffert. Dr. McGiffert was long professor of church history in Union Theological Seminary, New York, and has written largely on the history of Christian doctrine. "The significance of Luther's position at this point," he writes, "lies in the fact that he claimed to be already saved, not because already pure and righteous, but on other grounds altogether, and while still continuing to be impure and unrighteous. This constitutes the great difference between him and the Apostle Paul. Paul, too, thought of salvation as a present possession and of the Christian as already saved, but the ground of his salvation was moral transformation, not divine forgiveness. By the indwelling of the Spirit the Christian is not merely in process of sanctification, but is actually changed already into a holy being, or, in other words, is already saved. Paul was moved primarily by moral considerations, as Luther was not. To Paul the one dreadful thing was the corruption of the flesh to which the natural man is subject. To be freed from it by the agency of divine power -- this and this alone meant salvation. The influence of Paul, or the influence of the same forces which he felt, continued to dominate Christian thought, and salvation was always interpreted by Catholic theology, if not always by the Catholic populace, as salvation from sin. But the consciousness of sin was too general, and the sense of the divine presence and power too feeble to permit the heroic faith of Paul to continue, and salvation was inevitably pushed into the future, and the

transformation of human nature was thought of as a gradual process completed only in another world. Luther broke with the Catholic theory, not by going back to Paul and asserting a present and instantaneous sanctification, but by repudiating altogether the Pauline and Catholic notion of salvation, and making it wholly a matter of divine forgiveness rather than of human character." [52]

It is significant that these admissions concerning the teachings of the apostolic church regarding freedom from sin are all cited from the foremost modern historical scholars in the Protestant church.

These references have made the development very clear: the ancient apostolic church believed that salvation was salvation from sin and from sinning, and that it is enjoyed now in this present world. As the weary ages rolled onward the standard was gradually lowered; sin and worldliness crept into the assemblies of the Christians. In due course of time they felt ashamed to profess to be saved from sin now; still they believed that, properly speaking, salvation meant salvation from sin. Therefore they reasoned that the whole life on earth is a preparation for salvation in the future life. If a Christian man dies in a very advanced state of spiritual grace he will be saved and go to heaven at the end of his earthly life. Judging, however, by their observation and their own experience, they finally came to regard such a possibility as extremely remote. Only the rarest saints would, they thought, die and go directly to heaven. For the vast majority of professing Christians there would be a longer or shorter period of purgation of sin in purgatory, after which they would attain to salvation and then go to heaven. Nevertheless, for some fifteen hundred years one truth was held firmly: namely, salvation is from sin. However, this truth was held in company with so many superstitious and unscriptural theories that Luther threw away a precious grain of truth with the chaff and started anew, with the truth that salvation is here and now in this life. But he thought that salvation is not from sin but in sin. That is to say, the Christian's salvation from sin is a hope rather than a definite present experience. And it is sad to realize that many able Christian teachers continue to hold this teaching in our own day. James Arminius, in the seventeenth century, and following him, John Wesley, in the eighteenth, carried the torch back to the truth of the apostolic church. These great scholars said salvation is salvation from sin and that it is experienced now in the present life. That takes us back to the doctrine of John and of Paul, the glorious freedom and liberty of the sons of God, taught over and over again by the writers of the New Testament.

40 S. M. Merrill, *Christian Experience*, pp. 109-110

41 J. A. Wood, *Perfect Love*, p. 24

42 M. L. Haney, *Inheritance Restored*, p. 40

43 Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians, chap. 14

44 Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chap. 44

45 *The First Apology of Justin*, chap. 16

46 Adolph Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, Vol. I, p. 391

47 *Ibid.*, Footnote, p. 390

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 404-405

49 Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Vol. III, p. 173

50 Johannes Weiss, *The History of Primitive Christianity*, Vol. II, p. 574

51 *Ibid.*, p. 575

52 Andrew Cushman McGiffert, *Protestant Thought before Kant*, p. 25 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. Used by per.)

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