

No Breath No Life.

by Horatius Bonar

A person may have a sound creed, externally complete religion, numerous good works, or an exemplary life, yet still not be a Christian without the inward breath of life.

Scripture: Isaiah 64:6, Ezekiel 37:8, Matthew 7:22-23, John 3:6, John 20:22, Acts 1:8, Romans 8:11, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, James 2:19

Topics: "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "Spiritual Vitality"

Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes the necessity of the 'breath of life' in the spiritual life of individuals and congregations, using Ezekiel 37:8 to illustrate that mere appearance or sound doctrine is insufficient without the Holy Spirit's life-giving presence. He outlines four stages of spiritual renewal, highlighting that a church or individual may seem alive yet lack true vitality if they do not possess the Spirit. Bonar warns against self-deception, where one may mistake orthodoxy, religious practices, or good works for genuine faith. He concludes that without the breath of life, all efforts are in vain, leading to an imperfect, unhappy, and unsuccessful existence. The sermon calls for a deep, personal connection with God to truly embody the Christian life.

Transcript

"And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them." - Ezekiel 37:8

"Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them." - Ezekiel 37:8

This scene has two aspects (contains an event and a truth), the prophetic, which specially points to Israel's restoration in the latter day; the spiritual, pointing to the case of individual souls, or churches or congregations. There are four stages presented to us-

- (1.) the bone-heaps in the valley, "very dry;"
- (2.) the gathering and re-construction of these bones;
- (3.) the clothing with flesh, sinews, and skin;
- (4.) the infusion of breath or life.

It is through the last of these that the living man is constituted; and without it there is but the picture or statue of a man. The "breath" is manifestly the "life;" communicated by the Spirit of life. This life may have different stages; but wherever it is there is a true and complete man. The disciples had life before our Lord breathed on them, but then they attained more. They had life before Pentecost, but then they obtained more. It was life that God communicated when he created man; it is life (of a higher kind) that the Spirit of God communicates to the soul at conversion. The last Adam, as the possessor of the Holy Spirit, is thus a quickening Spirit.

Thus a man may be very like a saint and yet not be one. A church or congregation may be very like a Christian one, with a fair appearance and compact organization; all in excellent bustling order- numerous, liberal, united, earnest after a sort- and yet lack one thing which neutralizes and paralyzes all the rest- the breath of life.

I. Our creed may be sound, and yet we may not be Christians. Balaam's creed seems to have been sound; also that of Judas and Demas. It may be the creed of apostles and reformers, the creed of the Synod of Dort, or the Assembly of Westminster; yet all within may be wrong. It will form part of the bones, or the sinews, or the flesh; but that is all. No, its soundness may be the occasion of serious self-deception; we may mistake orthodoxy for life- the correctness of our confession of faith for the "breath." An inanimate, unproductive creed, what will it do for you in the day of the Lord? What will it do for you now? Does it give you real peace- real liberty- real fellowship with God?

II. Our religion may be externally complete, and yet we may not be Christians. By religion I mean all that pertains to the worship and service of God, private or public; our praises, our prayers, our sanctuary services, our family worship. What are all these without the inward breath? What is routine without life? Mechanical religion may do for the gods of Greece and Rome, but not for the living and true God. Mechanical religion may do for those who fancy that religious performances, or works done, or money paid, in order to ward off divine anger, and persuade God to keep them out of hell; but not for those who know that they are the channels of fellowship with God. Your sanctuary attendance may be regular and reverent; but what if there be no breath in it? Your prayers and praises may be punctual and exceptional, but what if there be no breath in them? Will God accept them? Will they satisfy you? Will they make you happy? Will they not be irksome and intolerable? And the more you multiply them, the more intolerable.

III. Our good works may be numerous and praiseworthy, yet we may not be Christians. It is not the work that makes the Christian, but the Christian that makes the work. This is a day of good works; of benevolent schemes; of societies great and small; of organizations for the relief of the poor, and the reformation of the wicked. They who conduct them may be earnest and self-denying men. But is the breath there? They often wonder why so much should be done with so little fruit. But is there not a cause? Is there breath, life, in all this? Can statues, or machines, or steam-engines do the work of the living God? No; it is life that does real work; it is life that is successful; it is life that God honors, and by which He works. Let us see that in doing Christian work, we ourselves are Christians; else we shall be but Noah's carpenters after all. We may do many good works, and yet not be Christians. Many shall come in that day, saying, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name. But the answer is, "I never knew you."

IV. Our life may be exemplary, and yet we may not be Christians. There may be bones, and sinews, and flesh, and yet no breath, no life! There are many who mistake a fair external deportment for Christian life. A man may be so like a Christian that another could not suppose that there was anything wrong; and yet there might be no breath!

A life with "no breath" must be-

(1.) A very IMPERFECT life. Many features lacking- even outward ones, much more inward. The light will be dim; the salt will lack savor.

(2.) A very UNHAPPY life. There is the secret feeling that all is wrong. Everything is irksome; for lack of the divine internal reality.

(3.) A very UNSUCCESSFUL life. It is not mere bustle, or earnestness, or zeal that does the true work for God. If there be no breath, what are these? All will be labor in vain. There is breath for you, O sinner? You will not be able to say, I perished, or I was unhappy, or useless, because God would not give me this breath.

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