

The Undesigned Calf

by James Blaine Chapman

The sermon explores the importance of causality, parental responsibility, and the influences that shape our character and faith.

Scripture: Galatians 6:7

Topics: "Cause And Effect", "Idolatry"

Description

James Blaine Chapman preaches on the story of Aaron and the golden calf, emphasizing the importance of recognizing that every action has a cause and nothing 'just happens.' He challenges the idea of existence coming from non-existence without a Life Giver and stresses the significance of adequate causes for every result. Chapman discusses the impact of environment and upbringing on individuals, highlighting the responsibility of parents in shaping their children's lives. He concludes by emphasizing the need for true objectives in one's religion, noting that every man is assimilated into the likeness of the object of his worship.

Transcript

"I cast the gold into the fire, and there came out this calf" (Ex. 32:24).

The words of this Scripture passage constitute part of Aaron's defense of his part in the making of the golden calf which the Israelites worshiped as an idol. In substance, he said that he had no design as to what would be the form of the objects which would come of the casting of the gold into the fire. "I cast in this gold," and to my surprise, "there came out this calf."

But, much as we dislike to reflect upon Israel's first high priest, Aaron was not giving a true record of what had occurred; for the record says that Aaron received the gold at the hands of the people and "fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf." This may have been a very imperfect image of a calf, but it was the best that Aaron could do, for he moulded the metal into the likeness of a calf and then removed the defects with a graving tool. The fact is, no calf ever "just happens;" there is always a cause.

It seems now that many of the things that science made us believe, much against our will and inclination, a few years ago, are not true after all. They argued with us until they made us believe that the Gulf Stream actually runs clear across the Atlantic Ocean and modifies the climate of England and Western Europe; now they tell us that this is a mistake, the Gulf Stream is lost in the deep ocean just a little distance off the Newfoundland coast. Well, I believed that to begin with, and if they would only have let me alone, I would

have been correct all the time. As it is, I went through all the cumbersome and farfetched evidence for nothing and am back at the beginning. Nevertheless, there is one thing: they will not get me to admit that it "just happens" that the climate of England is milder than a place of corresponding latitude in America.

I listen with some patience to the evolutionist as long as he tells me that certain adequate causes accomplished certain results; but when he begins to say that certain things actually happened he is sure they happened but he posits no adequate cause, right there I part company with him. All life started out either from the same place or from many places simultaneously; anyway, nothing adequate started it--it just started. Existence came from non-existence without any special cause order came out of chaos without any intelligence to direct it; life came without a Life Giver; mind came from unthinking matter; species continued on down the main line or branched off into myriad variations according to the decrees of chance. I do not believe any of this. If it sounds pharisaical to say that I am too religious to believe it, it will suit me just as well to say that I am too intelligent to believe it. It is no better to me than Aaron's calf story. There is a cause--adequate cause--for every result.

But the question of origin is subordinate to present being. We could excuse a man for coming from a monkey more easily than we can pardon him for being a monkey still. It would be better to be an animal lifted from the brute state by the cables of will and faith than to be a renegade angel. What we were is incidental to what we are.

Every child has a right to be well-born, though the defense of this right is left entirely to others. The general type of the human species is inherently determined; but this general type is affected by the distant and immediate progenitors; and it may be further modified by direct prenatal influences, either ignorantly or intentionally exerted. The first primary qualification of parenthood is the willingness and ability to endow one's progeny with healthy bodies, sound minds, and normal moral natures in which there is no bias resulting from accumulated depravity. But since none of us are permitted to choose our grandfathers, it is not proper that I should do more than to say that God and our parents have given us a certain amount of capital, and we prove our worthiness to exist by the increase that we can show on that original capital. Still, we must not forget that many a child is handicapped in the race of life by the meagerness of the legacy which was given him at birth. It takes training to make any colt a three-minute horse, and though the very best training will not make a three-minute horse out of a Shetland colt, still it will make a faster Shetland than it would have been without the training.

The second primary qualification for parenthood is the willingness and ability to give the child proper environment during its most plastic years. The home has more to do with the making of the child than any other factor. If a child was trained at home, he is likely to reflect the moulding and the graving which he received there. Of course we must acknowledge the power of individual choice and allow it to account for the exceptions to the rule, nevertheless, it is very seldom that one can just throw brute gold into the fire and a calf will walk out without any moulding and graving.

I used to preach that grace was a sufficient factor in the training of children, but I am convinced that it is not true. Some of the best people that I know have made a failure in the training of their children. Yet, with all that I know of families and children, the youth of my acquaintance are in my judgment, moulded and graven into their present form, very largely, by the environment to which they have been subjected.

There is more or less of what the theologians call antinomianism in us all. This is manifested in the tendency to exaggerate God's responsibility in human affairs. There is a reality in the transforming grace

of God, but there is a human responsibility that always precedes the Divine. Christians--true Christians--have a very large human element, hence a very large human responsibility; as well as a very essential Divine element in their makeup. The Christian home implies more than prayer and Bible reading. It implies more than prohibitions and moral precepts. I think I have seen homes where the parents were both professing Christians, where there was family prayer, where there were many of seen things that were truly Christian, and yet I would have been surprised to have seen strong, stalwart Christians come out of that home. Some may think that I am hinting that there was hypocrisy and inconsistency. I do not mean that at all; but there was something lacking and Christianity was made odious to the children there. I have seen parents accept an impractical attitude toward social questions, or a rigid policy toward education and progress, things that might have remained neutral, if they had not elected to make them tests of religion and by their attitude and policies they convinced their children of the impracticability and in-adaptitude of Christianity, and the children went out from Christian parents to become practical infidels. It was not a lack of old-time religion, but a lack of old-fashioned common sense that had wrought the disaster.

A man bewailed the delinquency of his eighteen-year-old boy and declared he could not understand how such results could come. In substance, he said, "I cast in the gold, and there came out this calf." But with a little investigation, I found that the boy had never been taught obedience as a child. He had played with questionable company, had roamed the streets and alleys, committed petty larcenies and indulged in by-words and questionable conversation since before he was of school age. The father was indulgent, the mother was kind, the neighbors were mad and the boy went wild. But as I looked him over, I could see the certain marks of the mold and of the graving tools; he was no accident.

Our argument for Christian schools and for Christian education is very simple. If the child is sent to school where his teachers dance, attend the picture shows and the theater, teach the various silly guesses of evolution and mock at religion; and where the students, as a whole, follow in the steps of their superiors and talk the talk which such associations naturally encourage; and where worldliness in its various forms and fads reigns without protest, then what wonder if the child does not turn out to be a foreign missionary, or a prayermeeting leader? Expensive as the task is, we must, nevertheless, provide for the education of our youth under proper Christian influences, if we save them for the kingdom of heaven.

But I can not pass without observing that, after all, man is the great factor in his own making or unmaking. Even with a small birthright, he may still amass a fortune. Roosevelt was such a weak lad that his parents sent him to a private school, lest he should get injured in play with the larger crowds at the public school. But he set in deliberately to "build" a body, and succeeded so well that he became husky, able, one critic said, to cope with the leading prize fighters of his day, but for his near sightedness which compelled him to wear glasses. Demosthenes has been represented to us as of mean bearing, a stammering speech, and embarrassed poise; but he overcame these defects and became the greatest orator of antiquity. There are others who never could get rid of their handicaps, but set in and won the race anyway. Paul could not get rid of his "thorn in the flesh," So sought grace to out-match it. Martin Wells Knapp was always frail, and often labored in pain, but he did a lifetime's work before he was out of his forties. Newton knew as little when he was born as any of us. Fletcher was as depraved by sin as other mortals, but arose to eminence in holy living by forces of his own election.

Reared among the moonshiners of the backwoods, Lincoln refused to drink, and arose to the highest place from the most obscure environment. Garfield learned to read after he was eighteen and then went on from the presidency of a college to the presidency of the United States. Such men followed the

intuitions of their own minds and hearts which rebelled against their environments, and were led out of the darkness into light. There were no schools, so Lincoln studied at home; there were no blackboards and chalk, so he used charcoal and a split pine board; there were no libraries, so he walked miles to borrow books; there were no opportunities for promotion, so he said he would spend his time getting ready, and then, "maybe the opportunity would come." It did come, and the nation is glad that it found Lincoln ready. Good things can "come out of Nazareth," even if Nazareth is off the main thoroughfares and proverbial for its lack of culture and progress. Such "good things" are not the products of Nazareth, but they must "come out" in order to fill their mission.

This is a world of wheat and tares, no matter where you go. You can find almost any thing and almost any kind of person, if you will make a sufficient search. And the things and persons that we seek affect us much more than those which come to us unbidden. The bird which flies over my head, may do so without my permission; but I have formed an alliance with the one that "makes a nest in my hair." The richest man this world ever saw was voluntarily without a place to lay His head; the kingliest man had no crown, but one of thorns, and no throne but a cross. The humblest man was crucified on the charge of blasphemy, and though crucified between two thieves and "numbered with transgressors," He still remained, "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners."

The eagle, it is said, rises faster in the face of the storm than in the time of calm. So, the contrast may stir the awakened to arise from the slime and darkness of his surroundings. The old maxim, "Blood will tell" may as well be an encouraging message as a disheartening one. It is the force to which one willingly submits himself that becomes the greatest factor in his moulding. The very effort required in the resisting of the low, the base and the vile will develop stamina and manhood in the overcomer. The necessity of choosing, occasions one of the most useful means for the moulding of the man. The world is full of would-be friends, choose for yourself; but remember that if you choose them, you have elected to make them factors in your own making. The world is full of books--choose and read; but remember that you will become like the books which you choose to read. There are ways, and ways, and ways in the world, select the one that you will travel; but remember that the way you will go will color your life quite as much as you will affect the course itself.

Finally, I must observe that all men have a religious nature and that it is the dominant nature. All other things are and ought to be subject to a man's religion. But this makes it the more important that he should have true objectives in his religion. Every man is "assimilated into the likeness of the object of his worship." The atheist becomes hard like the heart of the flinty, unyielding fate which he, in reality, worships. The agnostic applies his system of doubt to himself and to his friends and becomes fickle and faithless. The infidel has truly departed from his fidelity (as the word implies), and is unworthy of trust by his fellow-beings. The old Frenchman, descendant from the Huguenots, who was elected to the Chamber of Deputies, went to Paris from his home in the Pyrenees mountains. He rented a suite of rooms and paid the first month's rent. The landlord inquired whether he would require a receipt. "No," said the plain man of simple faith and simple virtues, "A receipt is not necessary. I know I have paid you, you know I have paid you, and God is witness between us." The proud Parisian curled his lip and said derisively, "So you still believe in God, do you?" "Why, yes," said the Christian, "don't you?" "No, not any more," replied the Parisian. "Then, in that case," said the Christian, thoughtfully, "I will take a receipt." The formalist's heart will die in order to conform to his creed and practice. The fanatic's intellect will warp and waver in order to meet the demands of his errata. But "a sound heart doeth good like a medicine." The true believer has a tendency to become "assimilated into Christ's likeness; and among the many and glorious phases of the

Christ character is that of perfect manhood. The strongest, bravest, wisest, best man; as well as the weakest, most cowardly, most ignorant, and most fallen, may look up expectantly to Jesus Christ and pray believingly:

"Oh, to be like Thee, Blessed Redeemer, This is my constant longing and prayer; Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures, Jesus, thy perfect likeness to wear."

And from such a mould, always the very best that you are able to choose, there will come out an image, which will still need the chiseling of the graving tools of life's further tests, but which, far from being of accidental Origin, is designed to be entirely like Him, when you shall "See Him as He is."

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