

Revivals And Church History :: Every Revival Begins With The Church On Her Knees by Andrew Bonar

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Shall the pastors lead in humble heart-searching, sincere repentance and persevering prayer?

By Andrew A. Bonar

Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-1843) was a Scottish preacher known as a "man who had been with Jesus." He ever aspired to be holy like Christ.

For himself and for all ministers, he wrote out what he felt would help in the quest for personal holiness and usefulness. The material below is excerpted from the "Personal Reformation" which he drew up for himself. If this saintly man needed to take such account of himself from time to time, how much more do we of this generation, when sin is treated so lightly!

A Confession of Sin

It is the duty of ministers in this day to begin the reformation of religion and manners with themselves, families, etc., with confession of past sin, earnest prayer for direction, grace and full purpose of heart, for Scripture has said, "He shall purify the sons of Levi" (Mal. 3:3).

I am persuaded that I shall do most for God's glory and the good of man, and I shall have the fullest reward in eternity by maintaining a conscience always washed in Christ's blood, by being filled with the Holy Spirit at all times, and by attaining the most entire likeness to Christ in mind, will and heart, that is possible for a redeemed sinner to attain to in this world.

Conscience Void of Offence

To maintain a conscience void of offence, I ought to confess my sins more. I ought to confess sin the moment I see it to be sin. Whether I am in company or in study, or even preaching, the soul ought to cast a glance of abhorrence at the sin. If I go on with what I am doing, leaving the sin unconfessed, I go on with a burdened conscience, and add sin to sin.

I ought to go to Christ for the forgiveness of each sin. In washing my body I go over every spot and wash it out. Should I be less careful in washing my soul? I ought to see the stripe that was made on the back of Jesus by each of my sins.

I feel when I have sinned a reluctance to go to Christ. I am ashamed to go. I feel as if it would do no good to go, as if I were making Christ a minister of sin, to go straight from the swine-trough to the best robe, and a thousand other excuse, but I am persuaded they are all lies, direct from hell.

I must never think a sin too small to need immediate application of the blood of Christ.... I must never think my sins too great, too aggravated, too presumptuous to hinder me from fleeing to Christ.

I must not only wash in Christ's blood, but clothe me in Christ's obedience. For every sin of omission in Self, I may find a divinely perfect obedience in Christ. For every sin of commission in Self, I may find not only a stripe or a wound in Christ, but also a perfect rendering of the opposite obedience in my place, so that the law is magnified, its curse more than carried, its demand more than answered.

I am tempted to think that I am now an established Christian "that I have overcome this or that lust so long, and that I have got into the habit of the opposite grace to the extent there is now no fear of the sin. I am tempted to think I may venture very near the temptation, nearer than other men. This is a lie of Satan.

As long as the Holy Spirit dwells in my heart He deadens me to sin, so that if I am tempted, I may reckon upon God carrying me through. But when the Holy Spirit withdraws, I am like dry gunpowder, ready to explode at the first touch. O for a sense of this!

My only safety is to know, feel and confess my helplessness, that I may hang upon the arm of Omnipotence.... I ought to study Christ's omnipotence more. Hebrews 7:25, First Thessalonians 5:23, Romans 6:14, Romans 5:9-10 and such Scriptures should be ever before me. I should flee temptation, should watch and pray. I should use the Word of God. "It is written...It is written...." So Christ defended Himself. (See Matthew 4.)

But the main defense is casting myself into the arms of Christ like a helpless child, and beseeching Him to fill me with the Holy Spirit. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4-5) – a wonderful passage.

Study Christ More

I ought to study Christ as a living Saviour more – as a Shepherd carrying the sheep He finds – as a King reigning in and over the souls He has redeemed – as a Captain fighting with those who fight with me (Psa. 35) – as One Who has engaged to bring me through all temptations and trials, however impossible to flesh and blood.

I am often tempted to say, How can Christ save us? How can Christ in heaven deliver me from lusts which I feel raging in me, and nets I feel enclosing me? This is the father of lies speaking to me again! The Bible says, "He is able also to save...to the uttermost" (Heb. 7:25).

I ought to study Christ as an Intercessor. He prayed most for Peter who was to be most tempted. I am on His breastplate. If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet the distance makes no difference; He is praying for me!

I ought to study the Comforter more – His Godhead, His love, His almightiness. I have found by experience that nothing sanctifies me so much as meditating on the Comforter, as John 14:16, "And I (Jesus) will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever." And yet how seldom I do this. Satan keeps me from it.

I am often like those men who said they knew not if there be any Holy Ghost...I ought never to forget that my body is dwelt in by the Third Person of the Godhead. The very thought of this should make me tremble to sin (1 Cor. 6:19-20). I ought never to forget that sin grieves the Holy Spirit – vexes and quenches Him...If I would be filled with the Holy Spirit, I must read the Bible more, pray more, and watch more.

I ought not to delay parting with sins. Now is God's time. "I made haste, and delayed not" (Psa. 119:60). I ought not to spare sins because I have long allowed them as infirmities and others would think it odd were I to change all at once. What a wretched delusion of Satan that is!

Prayer and Fasting

Whatever I see to be sin, I ought to set my whole soul against it, using all Scriptural methods to mortify it, as confession, contrition of soul, special prayer for the Spirit, fasting, watching...I ought to mark strictly the occasions when I have fallen, and avoid the occasion as much as the sin itself. Satan often tempts me to go as near to temptations as possible without committing the sin. This is fearful, tempting God and grieving the Holy Ghost. It is a deep-laid plot of Satan.

I ought to flee temptation, according to Proverbs 4:15, "Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away." I ought constantly to pour out my heart to God, praying for entire conformity to Christ, for the whole law to be written on my heart.

I ought statedly and solemnly to give my heart to God, to surrender my all into His everlasting arms according to the prayer, "Into Thine hand I commit my spirit" (Psa. 31:5), beseeching Him not to let any iniquity, secret or presumptuous, have dominion over me, and to fill me with every grace that is in Christ in the highest degree that it is possible for a redeemed sinner to receive it, and at all times, till death.

I ought to meditate often on Heaven as a world of holiness, where all are holy, where the joy is holy joy, the work holy work, so that without personal holiness I can never be there. I ought to avoid the appearance of evil.

I find that speaking of some sins defiles my mind and leads me into temptation, and I find that God declares it is a shame to speak of things that are done of them in secret. I ought to avoid this.

Eve, Achan, David, all fell through the lust of the eye. I should pray, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity" (Ps

a. 119:37).

I am persuaded that nothing is thriving in my soul unless it is growing. "Grow in grace" (2 Pet. 3:18). "Lord, increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). "Forgetting those things which are behind" (Phil. 3:13).

I am persuaded that I ought to be inquiring of God how I may overcome self and become more like Christ. I ought to strive for more purity, humility, meekness, patience under suffering, love. "Make me Christ-like in all things," should be my constant prayer, and "Fill me with Thy Holy Spirit."

From Memoirs And Remains of Robert Murray McCheyne.