

FOUR PERSONS

"Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all of them that believe; for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:22-23).

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17).

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3:2).

In the course of one's Christian experience it is possible for him to be four persons that I shall speak.

I. The Person You Were.

There is the person you were before you were saved: "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all of them that believe; for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:22-23). "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:6). "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jeremiah 13:23). Human nature does not like to be reminded of its depravity, but it is depraved, just the same. A faithful preacher gave a wonderful message on the depravity of the human heart. When he finished, somebody came up after the benediction and said, "I just can't swallow this depravity that you've been preaching about." The old preacher said, "You don't have to swallow it; it's already in you!" And so, whether we like it or not, we've got it.

Today people have a way of classifying their sins as mortal sins, venial sins, wrong sins, respectable sins, etc. Sometimes they grade sins. But God's Word does not deal that way. God calls a sin, "sin." We have new names for it today. We call it immaturity, theological growing pains, and a lot of other names. God's Word calls it sin in every case. We sometimes hire psychologists and psychiatrists to blame our weaknesses on our grandfathers, or on our grandmothers, but, in the Word of God, sin is sin. And, as far as salvation is concerned, there is no such thing as being more or less a sinner. A sinner is a sinner. You cannot be any more lost than lost, that is all there is to it. Nicodemus was just as lost as Barabbas, and the rich young ruler was just as lost as the impenitent thief on the cross. Sin is missing the mark, and an inch is as bad as a mile. It doesn't matter whether you are mayor or bootblack, rich or poor, beggar or thief -- there is no difference, for "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

Men say we need education; God says we need regeneration. Men say we need culture; God says we need Calvary. Men say we need to turn over a new leaf; God says we need a new life.

And you cannot change the unchanged life of a sinner by merely getting him into

a church. Some people might have been led to the Lord except for the fact that they had joined a church. But they got into a church in an unsaved condition, and then, when a man of God tried to preach to them, they said, "He doesn't mean me. He can't mean me. I'm a church member." We have a lot of church members that have been starched and ironed and never been washed. The process did not begin properly. They are stiff enough, if that has anything to do with it, but they have never been saved.

The human nature, the unchanged life, the life of sin, cannot be changed by any device of ours. You can give a modern man every sort of a blessing that ordinary humanity can afford: put him in a dress suit; put him in a limousine; give him a college diploma; start him out on an American highway with every advantage that can be given him, but if he is left to himself he knows not whither he came nor where he is going. He wanders around in the wilderness of error and ends up in hell because "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:6).

II. The Person You Are.

The second person is the person you are. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17). In I Corinthians 6:11 you have both of these fellows, the one you were and the one you are. "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." What a precious truth! And we have it again and again. "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Word." After mentioning certain sins Paul said: "In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth" (Colossians 3:7-8). It is different now. I Peter 2:25 says: "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." It makes a difference when you are saved. When you come out of sin and receive salvation, and out of brokenness into blessedness, there is a difference, for you are a new creature.

I believe in an experience with Christ that makes a difference. Dr. John A. Broadus used to say to his students in Southern Seminary: "Gentlemen, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth", but the way that some are pretending to preach it today, you would think that the gospel was the power of nobody unto nothing." Today many present it as though it did not have any power, but I am glad that it is dynamite. That is really the word there. It is the dynamite of God. It will make a man snow-white; it will make him solid as a rock, and straight as a gun barrel. It will change him from booze to the Bible, from card tables to prayer meetings, and from heartaches to hallelujahs. It will take question marks out, and put exclamation points in the place of them. It will take out fear and put in love. It will take out sorrow and put in joy. It will give you garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." God is able to revive the stones out of the rubbish and restore the years the locusts have eaten, and make it again another vessel. If Michaelangelo could take a hunk of marble and carve an angel out of it, if Luther Burbank could take a malarial swamp and make a health resort of it, if men can do that, then you and I should never doubt that:

"Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
Touched by a loving heart, wakened by kindness,
Chords that were broken will vibrate once more."

Do you have the possession, or just the profession? Do you know that you are saved? Are you really able to say, with understanding,

"What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought,
Since Jesus came into my heart?"

When the Lord comes in, a lot of things have to go out.

III. The Person You May Be.

The third person is the person that you may be as a Christian right now, if you are willing to let Christ live His life in you. We have a lot of people who are saved, but they never have moved over to the blessed place where they can say, "I am crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20) and "Christ liveth in me." It is one thing to live a changed life; it is another thing to live the exchanged life, where you have quit living in your own strength and the blessed Lord has taken over. Many today think that people go to heaven by trying to live like the Lord Jesus Christ. Nobody will ever get to heaven by living like Christ. Nobody has what it takes to live like Christ. The Christian life is not imitation; it is identification. You cannot any more pull yourself up to be like Christ than you can lift yourself up by your shoe strings. You cannot do it. There is a lot of talk about making Christ Master and having His spirit, living from His point of view, and all that sort of thing. That never took anybody to heaven, and it never will.

Then some people try to get to heaven by living for Christ. Some folks are trying to live for Christ just like people live for some other good cause, like world peace, but they never get to heaven that way. Paul did not say, "For to me to live is to live like Christ;" he said, "To me to live is Christ." Christ is the whole thing. He is the origin of my life; He is the sustenance of my life; He is the object of my life; He is the whole thing. Please take this thought with you if you forget all else, that the Christian life is not something we live by the help of Christ. The Christian life is Christ living in us by our consent. He did not come to take your part; He came to take your place, and that is an entirely different thing altogether. And the Christian life is when you quit trying to live by your own strength, by your own wit and will, and let Christ take over. That is the first step; that is the main issue. I am so glad that the Lord Jesus not only died for me, but that He lives for me, and He wants to live His life in me. He is my substitute and He has all that it takes.

IV. The Person You Will Be.

There is something else that is exceedingly precious. That is the person you shall be. The person you were; the person you are, as a Christian, if you are truly saved; the person you may be here and now by living victoriously; and, thank God, the person you shall be. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3:2). You know that you are not like Him yet, but the time is coming when you shall be like Christ.

If you are a defeated Christian, and some old habit, or some trouble has the best of you, why don't you move on out to full surrender and dedication, or move from the person you are to the person you may be by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit? Are you truly a victorious Christian? Have you ever moved out from trying and straining and striving into living in the fruitfulness of walking in the Holy Spirit? That you shall be filled with the Holy Spirit is your privilege and God's desire for every Christian.