

ST. SIMEON ANGLICAN CHURCH, OFF FUTA ROAD, AKURE

BIBLE STUDY, 28/01/2009

STUDY 2

THE GREAT CHANGE

II Corinthians 5:17

The heart of man must have an object unto which it is inclined or whereto it cleaves. The thoughts and affections of the soul cannot be idle or be without some object on which to place them. Man was made for God, to be happy in the enjoyment of Him, to find in Him a satisfying portion, and when he apostatised from God he sought satisfaction in the creature. While the heart of fallen man is devoid of grace it is wholly carried out to the things of time and sense. As soon as he is born, he follows his carnal appetites and for the first few years is governed entirely by his senses. Sin occupies the throne of his heart, and though conscience may interpose some check, it has no power to incline the soul towards God, and sin cannot be dethroned by anything but a miracle of grace. That miracle consists in giving the soul a prevailing and habitual bent towards God. The heart is taken off from the *love of* base objects and set upon Christ, yet *we* are required to keep our hearts with all diligence, mortify our lusts, and seek the daily strengthening of our graces.

This great change is not completed by a single act of the Spirit upon or within the soul, but occurs in distinct *stages*: it is commenced at regeneration, continues throughout the whole process of our experimental sanctification, and is only consummated at our glorification. For then shall he not only see the King in His beauty, see Him face to face, but he shall be made "like Him," fashioned unto the body of His glory, fully and eternally conformed unto the image of God's Son.

1. The dispensational change

II Corinthians 5:17; 3:1618; 4:167; Romans 7:14615; Deuteronomy 5:5; Galatians 3:19; Exodus 34:19; Hebrews 12:18624

"Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new". A careful and close look at II Corinthians 3:1618 and 4:167, will help us in understanding what the apostle was referring to when he said in 5:17 *"old things are passed away"*. First, he tells us in II Corinthians 3:7 that the glory connected with the old covenant *"was to be done away"* (II Corinthians 3:7, 9610). But he went further, saying, second, *"For if that which is done away was glorious much more that which remaineth is glorious"* (II Corinthians 3:11): the old economy and its ministry were but temporary and had even then been set aside. The sacrificing of bulls and goats was no longer valid now the Antitype had appeared. In the former epistle (I Corinthians 13:10) Paul had laid down the maxim that *"when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away"*, so here he declares the new covenant annulled the old, for that was never designed to have anything more than a transient existence. The "old things" which are "passed away" are circumcision, the temple ritual, the levitical priesthood, the whole of the ceremonial law; in a word, Judaism and all that marked it as a system. The pillar of cloud and of fire which guided Israel during their journeys was but external and temporary, but Jehovah has now "shined in *our hearts* unto the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ": that inward illumination abides in the believer forever—immeasurably superior are the "new things" which have displaced the old.

Christ's death and resurrection had caused "old things" to pass away: the old covenant, the Mosaic economy, Judaism was no more. *"All things had become new"*: a new covenant, Christianity, with better relationships and privileges, a superior standing before God, different ordinances of worship, had been introduced.

2. The great change

II Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 3:21; Ezekiel 36:25; I Corinthians 6:11; I Peter 1:22; Romans 8:7; Isaiah 61:1; Acts 10:38

"Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new". The miracle of grace effects a great change towards God in the one who experiences it. The great change consists first of a radical *change of heart towards God*. God discovers Himself unto the soul, makes Himself a living reality unto it, reveals Himself both as holy and gracious, clothed with authority and yet full of mercy. That personal and powerful revelation of God unto the soul produces an altered disposition and attitude toward Him.

Second, that great change consists in a *moral purification of the inner man*. Our characters are formed by the Truth we receive: our thoughts are more or less moulded, our affections directed, and our wills regulated by what we heartily believe. Truth has a vital, effectual, elevating influence. Any man who professes to take the Word of God for his guide and rule and is not altered by it, both internally and externally, is deceiving himself. A radical change towards God which is accompanied by a moral purification within, necessarily consists, in the third place, of a thoroughly altered attitude toward the *divine law*. Before there can be any genuine respect for and subjection to the divine law the heart's attitude towards its Governor and Administrator must be completely changed. Conversely, when the heart of any one has been won unto God, His authority will be owned, His government honoured, and his sincere language will be, "I delight in the Law of God after the inward man" (Romans 7:22). Thus, while the unregenerate are denominated "the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2) the regenerate are called "obedient children" (1 Peter 1:14), for obedience is one of their characteristic marks.

A real and radical change of heart towards God will, in the fourth place, be marked by a thoroughly altered attitude *towards sin*. Sin is that "abominable thing" which God "hates" (Jeremiah 44:4), and therefore that heart in which the love of God is shed abroad will hate it too. Sin is "the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4), and therefore each one who has been brought to "delight in the law" will detest sin and earnestly seek to resist its solicitations. Another important and integral part of the great change consists in the soul's deliverance from the toils of Satan. The regenerate have been delivered "from the power of Satan" (Acts 26:18; Colossians 1:13) and made "the Lord's free men". Though, he (Satan) is still suffered to harass and tempt them from without, but if they steadfastly resist him, he flees from them.

3. The change of heart

II Corinthians 5:17; John 5:18, 42; Romans 6:17, 18; Matthew 5:25; 11:27; 20:19; Romans 7:9; I Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:5; II Corinthians 3:18

In Romans 5:5, we read, "*the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us*". By nature no man has any love for God. Not only loveless, the natural man is filled with enmity against God (Romans 8:7). But when a miracle of grace is wrought within him by the Holy Spirit, his heart experiences a great change towards God, so that the One he formerly dreaded and sought to banish from his thoughts is now the Object of his veneration and joy, the One upon whose glorious perfections he delights to meditate, and for whose honour and pleasure he now seeks to live.

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, unto the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Corinthians 4:6). Spiritual illumination of understanding is one of the first works of God when He begins to restore a fallen creature. By nature he is in a state of complete spiritual ignorance of God, and therefore of his own state before Him, sitting in "darkness" and "in the region and shadow of death" (Matthew 4:16). That "darkness" is something far more dreadful than a mere intellectual ignorance of spiritual things: it is a positive and energetic "power" (Luke 22:53), an evil principle which is inveterately opposed to God, and with which the heart of fallen man is in love (John 3:19), and which no external means or illumination can dispel (John 1:5). Nothing but the sovereign fiat and all-mighty power of God is superior to it, and He alone can bring a soul "out of darkness into His *marvellous* light." As God

commanded the light to shine out of that darkness which enveloped the old creation (Genesis 1:2, 3), so He does in the work of new creation within each of His elect.

The shining of God's light in our hearts partially and gradually dissipates the awful ignorance, blindness, error, prejudice, unbelief of our souls, thereby preparing the mind to (in measure) apprehend the Truth and the affections to embrace it. By this supernatural illumination the soul is enabled to see things as they really are (I Corinthians 2:10-12), perceiving his own depravity, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the spirituality of the law, the excellency of truth, the beauty of holiness, the loveliness of Christ. Has the light of God shone in your heart? Nothing short of a miracle of grace can change a "natural man" (I Corinthians 2:14) into a "spiritual" one (I Corinthians 2:15). Only the might of Omnipotence is able to emancipate a servant of Satan and translate him into the kingdom of Christ.