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The Place Of Christian Character In A Spiritual Awakening

By E. P. J. Garrett, Conway, Ark.
(Southern Baptist Convention Sermon,
Richmond, Va., May 12, 1938)

Some months ago, when this Convention's Committee on Order of Business had its initial meeting, it was agreed that some attention should be given here to the need for, and some methods of promoting, a spiritual awakening. It was suggested that this hour might be used for striking the first note, from which there might later come a great and wide-spread harmony. God grant that this desire may be realized!

There are numerous elements in such a revival, any one of which might engage our best thought for days on end. We shall consider but one of them in these brief moments before us, and that is, The Place of Christian Character in a Spiritual Awakening. As a basis for our thinking we hear the words of Jesus in Matt. 5:13: "Ye are the salt of the earth," etc.

Let us first get the atmosphere in which these words were spoken. Jesus, pressed by the curious multitude, ascended the mountain. Surrounded by His disciples, He seated Himself and began teaching them. The first words He spoke related to their peculiar blessedness as His followers. Then He turned to some weighty responsibilities which they were to assume—the greatest ever placed upon human beings. Preeminent among these is that of possessing the character requisite to bearing to others divine blessings. By personal contact the tendency of the world to rotteness and decay must be hindered or prevented.

Salt Not Inherent

The "salt" is not inherent in mankind. It is a derivative, transmitted to men from a Source of perfect quality and unfailing supply. It is possessed because of a peculiar relationship to Him. Character is the lasting imprint made by a superimposed instrument of superior quality and power. Christian character is the indelible stamp of the crucified and

Living Christ.

If they had but known, the wise and mighty could have smiled that day when these words were spoken to a handful of Jewish peasants, huddled around a peripatetic Teacher from Nazareth, an obscure village in the Roman dependency of Galilee. Men might have pricked up their ears if Caesar in Rome had made such a statement to his cohorts, or if some Grecian philosopher had said them to his disciples. But the world was never to feel the impact of the power of Roman soldiers, or the worldly wisdom of Grecian philosophers, to any degree comparable to that beneficent force exercised by regenerated character. The mighty and the wise have not been called upon to perform the works of God, but rather the humble who have become partakers of the divine nature through vital connection with Jesus Christ. The call of the world has ever been for people transformed to bear the very nature of Jesus Christ into every human relationship.

When Jesus enunciated this pregnant truth that day He was passing no idle or fulsome compliment. He was not saying that they were made of finer clay than their fellows, nor that their cultural graces were more alluring, nor that they were in any mortal way superior. He was laying upon their conscience a sense of responsibility before which any thinking person might well quail. "You," He says in effect, "you are dwelling in a society that is on the verge of decay, and the only thing that can prevent total and irremediable putrefaction is for you to put your purified lives up against it and arrest the process already far advanced. How His disciples received His charge we do not know; but we, as inheritors of the same commission need to examine well our innermost souls before we lightly accept His charge and challenge.

The Significance of the Metaphor

The germs of decay are in all human society, and invariably bring rotteness if allowed to do their normal work. The germs of spiritual



DR. OTTO WHITTINGTON

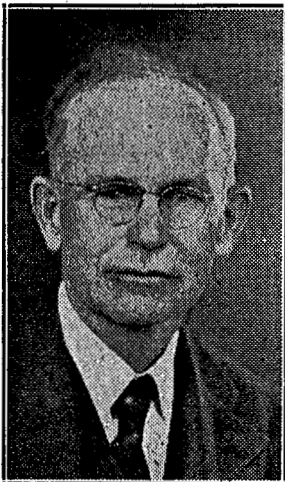
Dr. Otto Whittington will assist Brother H. M. Geren, pastor of the Second Baptist Church, El Dorado, in a revival beginning Sunday, May 29.

Dr. Whittington is well known over the state. He served as state organizer Campaign in 1937 and was pastor of of the Arkansas Baptist Redemption Immanuel Baptist Church, Little Rock, for seventeen and one-half years. He re-entered the evangelistic work in February of this year.

death are in the world, and the application of the salt of Christ alone can prevent total dissolution. Before the downward trend of this day in which we live is halted, and before the appalling moral conditions are alleviated, there must come to those who have been born of God's Spirit a new sense of responsibility for being unqualifiedly "the salt of the earth."

Spurgeon is quoted as having said to his vast congregation, "Give me your holy living; and with your holy living as a lever, I will turn the world upside down." "Give me your holy living," Jesus would say to us today, "and with it I will convict the gainsayers, I will astound the critics, I will attract the docile, I will curb the violent, I will break the hearts of the impenitent, I will solace the sorrowful, I will cheer the faint, I will encourage the downhearted, I will shame the impudent, I will correct the wandered, I will arrest moral decay everywhere." The world is waiting for the hosts of Jehovah to obey His injunction, "Be ye holy!" Only

(Continued on Page 15)



H. M. GEREN

H. M. Geren is a native of Tennessee. He was ordained to the ministry by the Inman Street Baptist Church of Cleveland, Tennessee, in 1896. He was educated in Carson and Newman College, Jefferson City, Tennessee, and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary of Louisville, Kentucky.

The following are some of the pastorates he has held during his ministry: Anacostia Baptist Church, Washington, D. C.; Fayetteville, Tennessee; First Baptist Church of Farmersville, Texas; First Baptist Church of Lancaster, Texas; and the First Baptist Church of El Dorado—succeeding Bro. H. C. Rosamond.

During the eight years previous to his present pastorate he ministered to rural churches of Liberty Association, holding revivals and baptizing many into the churches.

At this time he was elected for four consecutive years Moderator of Liberty Association. His ministry of love and brotherly kindness among the churches and pastors will not soon be forgotten.

He was called to the Second Baptist Church of El Dorado in 1931. Under his leadership the membership increased rapidly. On account of the large crowds attending his ministry it was necessary to enlarge the building. This enlargement was made possible by the generosity of the late W. W. Wells.

During the present pastorate a burdensome debt of fifteen thousand dollars has been removed, to the great

(Continued on Page 11)

THE PLACE OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER IN A SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

(Continued From Page 1)

Such a separation from the world, such a bearing of the image of the heavenly, will make us function as the salt of the earth was intended to do. In the figure that Jesus uses there is an intimation of the moral condition of the generation in which He executed His mission on earth, and into which He was about to send His disciples. It was a violent age, when might was right; it was a sensual age, when unchastity walked in public with a bold front, the home had largely lost its sanctity, and even religion bore the stamp of profligacy; it was a dissolute age, in which bestiality was followed by disease and death; it was a disloyal age, when governments were ruled by despots and wrecked by deceit; it was an unfaithful and untrustworthy age, in which economic relations were honey-combed with chicanery; it was an irreverent age, when religion amongst the Jews had sunk to shame and hypocrisy. In every area of human experience the savor of Christian character was desperately needed to purify the threatened decay and collapse of human society.

A Dark But True Picture

One does not confess himself a pessimist today who sees conditions sinking to the moral level that obtained in the Roman Empire nineteen hundred years ago. Who will gainsay the correctness of this modern catalog; corrupt politics prevalent in every land; a distressing lack of integrity in business; economic conditions in which capital and labor run neck and neck in unholy efforts to gain unrighteous advantages; the presses putting forth millions of pages of corrupting literature; the salacious moving pictures poisoning the minds of people of all ages, and probably creating more criminals than all other agencies combined; the state and national governments in our land, with utter disregard for all commitments to the contrary, flooding dry territory with hard liquor over the protest of outraged citizens; the most degrading forms of gambling licensed and encouraged by civil government; domestic life being undermined and corrupted by easy marriage and divorce, making consecutive bigamy and polygamy respectable and promoting legalized adultery; sections of the social life of all elements in our population rotten to the core; some colleges and universities according to reliable reports, employing teachers and using texts that set forth principles altogether contrary to Christian ideals and common decency; and churches, having forgotten the exhortation to withdraw from those who walk ungodly, with long rosters of worldlings who neither support the body of Christ with their presence and means, nor lend their influence to the promotion of the things of the Kingdom of God? If the salt was needed when Jesus taught His disciples on the mountain, it is needed in our land today.

The Bright Side

We are reminded, however, by a cursory glance at Christian history, of the effect of the salutary life upon every phase of human society through the ages. The spirit of Jesus, reproduced in millions of lives, has made known the saving gospel, has built and maintained hospitals and orphanages, has made good neighbors and trusted friends, has produced many righteous rulers and upright citizens, devoted husbands and wives, obedient and exemplary children, and has made the world a better place in which to live. Imagine if you can extracting from the earth the beneficent influences of Christianity for the past nineteen centuries. To do so would be to obliterate every bright spot in this period, leaving over all the unrelieved gloom of unrestrained sin hanging like a pall. The salt of the earth has been effective wherever applied.

The call of Jesus today is to all the estates of spiritual Israel: pastors, teachers, evangelists, and all who occupy the pews. The position of His followers in the eyes of a critical world has been reversed in these intervening centuries, and we have an incomparably better opportunity to influence the world than the early disciples had. He called not many noble, not many wise, not many mighty from the standpoint of the world; but in these latter days He has in His working force men and women of vast wealth, of erudition, of culture, of standing, of influence. From the human standpoint Southern Baptists have everything that the mind of man can require to make a deep and lasting impression upon the world in which we operate. But Jesus required more; and the situation we face requires more. His demand is for character — Christ's character — reproduced in those who claim Him as Lord. The first forward step in the spiritual awakening about which we are talking and writing and praying, and planning is a step backward to God. The healing, cleansing, preserving character of our God must be the distinguishing mark upon us as a people before any scheme or organization can produce the heavenly results for which honest souls pray. We must be in very truth the "salt of the earth" before we can influence the ungodly world for Christ.

One thing Christ's followers can and must do: we can and must arrest the corruption in the world by applying to it our own purity — a purity bestowed upon the regenerate when they become "partakers of the divine nature". Salt is an active principle, and makes its impression by the gift of itself. In rendering its service it loses its identity. Satan is tempting us continually to do our work under the eyes of our fellows in order that we ourselves may at least share in the glory. Jesus warned that we work to the end that our Father in heaven might be glorified. The moment Southern Baptists seek to become the cynosure of all eyes because of a revival movement which we propose to launch directly, that moment our locks will be shorn and the curse, rather than the blessing, of our God will be upon us.

A true believer's presence in a community, small or large, helps to create a sentiment favoring the right. Whether the revival for which we pray comes soon or late, it will come largely because people old and young, in high places and low, exhibit in every expression of life the character of the Christ whom we love and whom we serve. When people in the churches show in their behaviour the different life that is proclaimed from the pulpits the ungodly unbeliever will be impressed by the minister's message.

Salt is effective in proportion as it is kept clean, free from adulteration, and applied directly to the object that needs it. Christ produces the character; but He requires of us that we apply it. Its genuineness is tested and proved by its ability to function. Give it a chance. It will be active if allowed to operate. All the Christ life asks is an opportunity. All that salt requires is contact. Apply it to the world's need. Inactive salt is anomalous. When salt is not salty, it is as truly playing out of the character as when dirt is parading as salt. Jesus calls this by the ugly name of hypocrisy, play acting, pretense that is contrary to fact. Sincerity, consistency, honesty with ourselves, our fellows and our God requires that we act as we profess; more, that we act what we are. This takes courage in a day when the bars have been so lowered that our churches retain in their membership a nondescript aggregation guilty of the grossest sins. Time was when the sinner was reproved and rebuked, sometimes rather impatiently; but now any group of pastors will declare that the paramount problem of church discipline is to know where to begin, so full are our churches of transgressors of every sort. Surely there is a way, through prayer and the exercise of the combined wisdom of all the churches, to bring the groups nearer to the requirements of Christ. Power to save humanity that is ready to rot is not coming until individual Christians accept the commission to live holy lives just as they do the commission to accept the doctrines of Christ, and until churches are as correct in their living as they are in their doctrines. May we never hear from the lips of Jesus: "Woe unto you, hypocrites; you claimed to be the salt of the earth, but your lives were as rotten as the rest."

(To be Continued Next Week)

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THE PLACE OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER IN A SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Southern Baptist Convention Sermon
By E. P. J. Garrett, Conway
(Continued from last week)

Match Belief With Practice

We Baptists have been claiming through the years that our doctrines and practices track the New Testament model as do those of no other Christian group. If we want to substantiate our claim to superiority because of conformity to the first century type of faith we must match belief with practice. If we claim for ourselves greater loyalty in matters of doctrine we must reinforce that claim by the production of a higher type of character. What shall it profit us, or the cause of Christ, if we shout our avowal of orthodoxy from the housetops if we come down to live on the level of the general run of professed believers? We are convinced that the unadulterated teachings of our Lord will produce superior character. If we want our conviction accepted by the ungodly world we must produce a greater degree of Christlikeness than any other believers in the world. Are we meeting the pragmatic test? If not, there is something wrong either with the doctrines or with the adherents of the doctrines. We will not admit that the fault lies with the doctrines. Fellow Baptists, the call today is not for a revision of the central truths of our faith but for holy living in keeping with the doctrines we profess.

"So let our lips and lives express

The holy gospel we profess;

So let our works and virtues shine,
To prove the doctrine all divine.

To accomplish its purpose in the world, salt must come into intimate contact with the object to be saved. Herein lies one of the gravest problems of the Christian life. Nearly every Christian worker is called upon sooner or later to risk his reputation in order to help some person of evil repute. Shall we sack up our salt and store it away, or shall we put it up close against the place that is ready to rot? Jesus calls us to live dangerously. Henry Van Dyke once said, "It is not enough to say, 'Touch not the unclean thing.' On the contrary, we must touch it, as salt touches decay to check and overcome it . . . There is a loftier ambition than merely to stand high in the world. It is to stoop down and lift mankind a little higher. There is a nobler character than that which is incorruptible. It is the character which acts as an antidote and preventive of corruption. . . . What the world needs today is not a new system of ethics. It is simply a larger number of people who will make a steady effort to live up to the system which they have already."

We pause a moment for personal appraisal, made in the conscious presence of Christ: are we indeed the salt of the earth?

Savorless Salt

Jesus warns us here that the believer can lose his witnessing power. Of all the tragedies of Christian ex-

perience, none is greater than the loss of influence for righteousness on the part of a regenerated soul. For Christian character to become so stained and so compromised by disreputable living as to lose all power to commend Christ to another human being would seem an impossibility if we did not see indisputable evidences of it.

The verb translated here "lost its savor" is derived from a root meaning dull, sluggish, stupid, foolish. Sin is not only clear evidence of depravity, and a crime against God; it is also an evidence of crass stupidity. For the salt to lose its savor, for the Christian to lose his witnessing power, is not only criminal but also the height of folly. For that which may be put to the highest possible earthly use, which has in it the essence of divine purity and power to allay or prevent putrefaction, which possesses an active capability of blessing akin to that of God, to become by its own volition worthless and useless convicts it of folly unspeakable. If this seems strong language, let us remember that we are quoting Jesus. We need to see ourselves as He sees us. It is a surpassingly glorious mission upon which He has sent His disciples, endowed with a spiritually antiseptic power, and they must not be guilty of such criminal obtuseness as to cast it lightly away. Is not that the reason for our falling upon the evil days which we deplore? Is it not true of organized Christianity everywhere that many of its adherents are lacking in superior character? And is it not also true that we shall look in vain for a revival that shall sweep the multitudes into the fold of the Great Shepherd of the sheep until disciples of Christ come to exhibit more convincingly His character? If a godless world holds us in contempt, have we anybody to blame but ourselves?

Good Fo' Nuthin'

Amongst the Negroes of the black tobacco belt of Kentucky following the Civil War, there was current an expression full of meaning when one was idle and shiftless, he was called "good-fo'-nuthin'". The acme of contempt was in the words. It was a shame from which one with difficulty could recover to have these black people, just emerging from slavery, express for him such withering contempt. But here we have Jesus pronouncing in measured terms that believers who have been untrue children of the heavenly Father, who have misrepresented the essential nature of the living God by inconsistent and sinful living, are simply and finally "good for nothing". Bought we have been by the blood of Christ, regenerated by the operation of the Holy Spirit, instructed by the Book of God which is ever at hand — and yet, we may be so unmindful of our privileges, and so unfaithful to our highest engagements, that Jesus must say that we are "good for nothing".

We pause a moment for personal appraisal: are we innocent of the great transgression which would justify our Lord in so addressing us?

A Lost World's Hope

Our Lord is concerned about this world in which we live. Before He

came in the flesh, He made it. When He came to sojourn awhile, He taught it. Upon the cross, He died to redeem it. After His resurrection, before He left it to go back to glory, He gave explicit directions for the promotion of its best interests. All the while, He loved it. The last word on His lips before He ascended was "earth". He charged His disciples to take the news of His redemptive love to every nook and corner of it. And now, if the representatives of Jesus fall, wherein lies the world's hope?

It dignifies the position of every believer in Christ Jesus to recognize that He is God's transformed personal agent, set to effect a like transformation in all the sons of men. Satan's throne was set up in Pergamum, and a handful of disciples there faced one of two consequences: to arrest the prevailing corruption, or to be swallowed up by it. Neither they nor we should complain of such a wicked environment. It is a fertile field for the exercise of Christian character. Our Lord came into just such a world with His ministry of purification, and we are left to continue the task. The forces of evil are not quiescent, but continually and vigorously active. Milton says of Moloch:

"Not content with such
Audacious neighborhood, the wisest
heart

Of Solomon he led by fraud to build
His temple right against the temple
of God."

We are required to reverse the process, and, taking the initiative, build the temple of God over against every idol shrine. The only way to overcome evil is by the use of active good. The guns of Satan can be spiked, the forces of evil can be defeated, the Kingdom of Christ can be established. We are not engaged in a losing battle. We are not supporting a lost cause. We are not to be wiped off the face of the earth by a spiritual epidemic of evil. Christian character, the instrument and agent of the Captain of our salvation, when yielded unreservedly to His omnipotent hand can and will stay the prevailing corruption. Do we believe it? Dare we do it?

Finally

Fellow Baptists, there is in us a conviction as deep as life itself that the one all-embracing solution to this world's problems, and the full and complete supply of all its needs, is GOD. Every individual, domestic, social, civic, economic, religious, national, international question is answered by God in the flesh, Jesus the Christ, who is our Saviour and Lord. He must be got to the world's disease of sin and directly applied. "The gospel is the power of salvation to every one that believeth." That gospel must be proclaimed, and people must be persuaded to believe, by any and all righteous means. The proclamation by human tongues is a fixed necessity in the plans of Christ, as we very well know. We know, too, that this proclamation will be effective in proportion as the proclaimer can point to its beneficent effects in the lives of believers. The skeptical world demands a demonstration. If we Baptists will match our loyalty in doctrine with corresponding purity of life, we can sup-

ply our heavenly Father with the most effective instrument for the accomplishment of His purposes of grace in the world that time has ever known. He has laid upon us the responsibility of being the salt of the earth; and this salt, unadulterated and directly applied, will arrest this earth's corruption and sweeten its life. This requires that each of us lay aside personal ambition and love of the place and recognition by men, and lose ourselves in saving others.

"Go, labor on; spend and be spent;
Thy joy to do the Father's will;
It is the way the Master went,
Should not His servant tread it still?"

"Go, labor on; 'tis not for naught;
Thine earthly loss is heavenly gain;
Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee
not;

The Master praises, what are men?"

"Go, labor on; enough while here
If He shall praise thee; if He deign
Thy willing heart to mark and cheer;
No toll for Him shall be in vain."

EIGHTY MEXICAN CATHOLICS HEAR GOSPEL IN MISSION SERVICE

By Andres R. Cavazos
Mexican Missionary

On Sunday the 17th of April we had a series of meetings in the country, and I preached to more than eighty people, most of them Catholics. They listened with attention to the message of God, and I distributed much Baptist literature.

The mission at Rancho Blanco had to close because the brother who let us have the preaching services in his home died April 10. He was a member of this church, and we are sad because he was one of the brethren who helped us most financially.

The church is passing through a severe test economically. Its members have already begun to emigrate in the search of work and we are left alone. Last night we dismissed two families who are going to North Dakota. God bless them.

MOTHER IS OVER THERE

Mother Dear is over there
In that land beyond compare;
She is free from every care;
All the glory she will share.

Here she daily knelt in prayer
As each burden grew heavy to
bear;
Her Savior heard and blessed her
there
As she told Him her every care.

Her faith in God was very great;
She urged us to repent — not
wait;
If we would share her home in
side the Gate,
We must come to Jesus before it
be too late.

Yes, Mother is over there
In that land so bright and fair;
She sees us as we kneel in prayer
And cast on Jesus all our care.
— Mrs. G. B. Mabry, Holland, Ark.