

Apostolic Distinctiveness

Rom. 12:2

W. R. White, Pastor First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City
(Sermon preached at Southern Baptist Convention
Baltimore, Wednesday, June 12, 1940.)

The twelfth chapter of Romans brings us to the practical application of a mighty doctrinal treatise. Paul realizes that a life on the altar of God maintaining a distinctiveness according to its nature by spiritual renewal is absolutely essential to the effective application of great truths to practical affairs.

Our text urges us not to be fashioned by this age but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds that we may test and follow the will of God, the good, the acceptable and the complete. A similar exhortation is found in 1 Pet. 1:13, 14: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance." We find other companion scriptures such as, "And be renewed in spirit of your mind, and that ye put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and holiness of truth." Eph. 4:23, 24. "And have put on the new man, which is renewed into knowledge after the image of him that created him;" Col. 3:10. "Wherefore be ye not unwise, understanding what the will of the Lord is." Eph. 5:17.

There are three great considerations in our study: The Resistance, The Renewal, and Re-affirmation.

INTRODUCTION

Romans 12:2

All religions tend to drift from their original norm. The constant pressure of their environment, frequent emergencies and the subtle infiltration of alien ideas explain this phenomenon. As a rule, each religion is purest and best near its source and early beginnings. This is true of the great ethic religions and to a measure is true of Christianity.

The main stream was kept pure through the New Testament era. The use of current phrases whether those of the masses or those of the philosophers has caused students to blunder in pointing to these as evidences of a borrowing from various points of view. These phrases and words were practical vehicles used to convey a distinctive Christian content as a more thorough examination has shown.

In the eddies and edges of the main stream compromises with the "isms" and philosophies of their environment are reflected in the records of the New Testament. The process of conformity can be clearly seen in the apostolic age. This continues for a time until the main stream becomes corrupted. At length the New Testament type was driven to the edges and finally to hiding.

There are three modern forces which threaten to engulf Christianity. The pressure is terrific. I refer to Totalitarianism, Paganism, and Opportunism.

THE RESISTANCE

Totalitarianism means complete conformity to the will of the state. The state is the wheel and the individual is a cog. All of life is rigidly regimented unto the ends of the state. Totalitarianism is achieved through Fascism by complete control and through Communism by both state ownership and control. The loss of freedom and individual initiative are the results in both instances. A secular conformity with its withering blight upon spiritual values is inevitable. Christian faith is suffocated by forced conformity and materialistic motives.

The high ends of the church are thwarted and diverted. This is done not only by political pressure but by the very atmosphere created by the spirit of a totalitarian order. The church becomes the victim of political expediency.

In secular realms the efficiency and deadly effectiveness of the totalitarian order make it imperative that the democratic process must be suspended or greatly modified for a while in order to save democracy from destruction. Church leaders are pondering over the necessity of a great centralization among believers in order to stave off ruin to Christianity. The analogy does not hold. One is a political entity and the other is a spiritual entity. In the state it is done to meet a temporary emergency; the proponents of church centralization seek a permanent arrangement.

"Be not fashioned by this age" is the message for the disciples of Christ.

We have many illustrations of the results of totalitarian churches both ancient and modern. We know what has happened to genuine Christianity when any church has had a monopoly in a state. When even two totalitarian churches have had a joint monopoly the results have been slightly different. The use of force to compel conformity has stained the record of every totalitarian church. It is logical and inevitable. The unity of the totalitarian ideology and the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace are totally different concepts.

If we throw together a conglomerate mass composed of not only those who are regenerated but of that large group who embrace a form of godliness but are untouched by its power, we will involve Christianity in a greater enigma than the problems we seek to solve. We create a powerful monopolistic advantage dominated by those most susceptible to its temptations.

Paganism is another subtle force seeking to fashion us. It is a point of view, an attitude and an atmosphere which arises from carnal motives. It may have either a cultured or a coarser exterior. It may be highly sophisticated or grossly ignorant.

We have paganism in pleasure and amusement. So much of man's recreation is downright dissipation. It inflames lower urges and suffocates higher aspirations. It intensifies physical desires and dulls spiritual sensibility. It leads the strong to plunge into selfish indulgences, regardless of consequences to the weak.

What is sometimes called realism is nothing but paganism. The wide use of profanity and obscenity is a good example. According to the modern realists, our eyes must behold at length naked vileness, our olfactory nerves must be exposed for hours to foul odors, we must take a plunge into a cesspool of lewdness now and then, in order to be realistic. Our point of view cannot be balanced if we view the lovely landscape o'er and do not crawl through a sewerage pipe occasionally. "Chaste expressions, phrases and references that will help us to be poignantly aware of filth and to be repelled by it, are not enough," they say. This age not only condones such realism but revels in it. In order to save its face it dares to lend respectability to the indecent.

Paganism has invaded our conception of liberty. If the rights of decency and rights of indecency clash in our school systems, then decency must be restrained and indecency released in the name of liberty. In other words, academic freedom must include freedom for filth. Paganism confuses liberty with license.

Opportunism is a great force in the present age. It has been a fashioning influence of real significance. The desire to be like others and the dislike of isolation often causes man to compromise and vacillate. Even the Church becomes too sensitive to the criticism of the world. Popular trends have much weight with him. Sometimes consciously but often unconsciously he begins to make adjustments which include an element of surrender. None of us likes to be called narrow or selfish. We dislike even more to be called bigoted.

The most dangerous form of pressure comes from the erroneous thinking of good men and the judgments of successful men. The worldly wisdom of good men has frequently misled. Many business men, scientists and other recognized leaders often invade the field of religion and speak dogmatically on subjects for which they have no particular qualification. In order to receive the approval and applause of these, the spiritual leaders forget the true criterion of spiritual action.

THE RENEWAL

The judgements of spiritual men are to have more weight in the realm of religion than the opinions of other men, regardless of their boasted learning. "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know because they are spiritually judged. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things yet he himself is judged of no man." 1 Cor. 2:14,15. Here Paul is correctly interpreting teachings of the Savior

who said, "I thank thee O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." And again where he said, "And I will pray the Father and He shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever; the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you and shall be in you." We are listening too, much to the reactions of worldly wisdom and not enough to those of prophetic and spiritual insight.

Spiritual renewal which reveals the will of God because of constant contact with the mind of God is the supreme need of all Christians, particularly those in places of leadership. Continuous renewal through contact with the original source and norm of our faith guarantees our distinctiveness. A great artist had to frequently refresh his mind with a perfect color scheme, in order to maintain his fine taste in color discrimination. Too much with the world blurs our discernment and blunts our taste. Paul could say "For me to live is Christ," because he could first say, "We have the mind of Christ." The mind of Christ is imparted to us by the Holy Spirit: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given unto us of God." The key to this refreshing of our minds from the mind of God is found in John 7:39,40 and beautifully expressed in William's translation: "Whoever continues to believe in me will have," as the Scripture says, "rivers of living water continuously flowing from within him." By this he referred to the Spirit that those believing in Him were going to receive.

The corrective and directive will of God is the norm of our distinctiveness. God's will is the good, the acceptable and the perfect. It is not capricious or arbitrary. It is grounded in the eternal rightness of things. It is the way of the universe. Sin and the spirit of the age pull us out of the orbit of his will. We may be moving along the track of compromise with some degree of orderly relationship to the elemental order of things like a comet, but we face the inevitable issue of our aberration. If we surrender to his will without reservation, the basic dynamic of all power will swing us into line and into perfect harmony with the ultimate reality.

THE RE-AFFIRMATION

Our first affirmation is that a Christian world is a hopeless world. In the first and second chapters Paul is showing why the Gentile is lost and without excuse. He is in darkness and sin because he turned away from the light of an original revelation, continues to sin against the light of nature and of his own conscience. The Jew is lost because he has not only sinned against all these but against the greater light of the oracles of God. All of us will agree now that a scientific and sophisticated world is more hopeless than any without Christ. Man is hopeless both because of his nature and by practice.

Our second affirmation is that the focus of divine redemptive love is in Christ. We are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. He is the only medium and mediator of salvation. There is no substitute or sharing in this prerogative either by priest, prelate, saint or sacrament. He is the acme of divine light, life and love.

Our third affirmation is that the nature of man and a righteous God make salvation by grace inescapable. We must exalt man above what he is or reduce God to render logical any other way. Salvation by grace lifts the motive of goodness to one of gratitude and love and clothes the saint with humility.

Our fourth affirmation is that salvation is open to the direct appropriation of each individual upon a personal basis. Others may show the way but the individual must make that sacred approach for himself. In that holy moment when the living union is affected only the Triune God and the individual soul are necessary.

Our fifth affirmation is that salvation by grace produces a spiritual democracy. All stand under the same condemnation before salvation, all appropriate salvation by the same method, all are born into the same relationship, "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."

Our sixth affirmation is that salvation is more than a fiat which fixes, it is a factor that fashions. "For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Eph. 2:10. "For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do for his good pleasure." Phil. 2:13. "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ." Phil. 1:6. The Christian should be the most peaceable, teachable, workable, and lovable and should have the best attitude toward others, particularly the weak and his enemies.

Our seventh affirmation is that faith must be free from secular regulation or alliances. Its very nature requires this freedom and separation. This does not mean conflict or irrelevancy as to the relationship of church and state. They can mutually reinforce each other by a distinctive functioning. We may render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's without being discourteous or careless toward either. But their prerogatives must not be confused. Let us remember that Caesar is ordained of God and can serve the purposes of God in his peculiar sphere. The church can make Caesar's task easier by providing atmosphere, attitudes, and good citizens. This is as vital as separation itself. "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and authorities, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work." Titus 3:1. "For the Lord's sake submit to all human authority; to the emperor as supreme, and to governors as sent by Him to punish those who do evil and to reward those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live like free men, only do not make your freedom a pretext for doing evil, but live like slaves of God. Show honor to everyone. Practice love for the brotherhood, practice reverence to God and honor to the Emperor." I Pet. 2:13-17 (Williams)

Our eighth affirmation is that the sovereignty of God is the only safe totalitarianism. No one else is wise enough, powerful enough, good enough and loving enough to be the total sovereign of one individual much less the human race. The formula for the realization of this totalitarianism: "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring and they shall hear my voice and there shall be one shepherd and one fold." Jno. 10:16. "Neither pray I for these alone; but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they may all be one; as thou, father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Jno. 17:21. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all." Eph. 4:5-6.

Our ninth affirmation is that the climax of the work of grace is inevitable. This faith is a powerful factor for good. Some one has said that faith is walking with God in the dark and finding peace. Brethren, we will have to walk in the dark for some time to come. Shall it be with Him? Will we have peace? "We also have a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts." 2 Peter 1:19. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation has appeared unto all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope the appearing of the glory of our great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a people for his own possession zealous of good works." Titus 2:11-14.

Brethren, this is no time for compromise. This is no time to dilute our sacred principles. This is no hour to lose our identity or to weaken our testimony. If they call us bigoted, let our spirits grow sweeter; if they call us narrow, let us fight the harder for the rights of those who accuse us; if they call us isolationists, let us become more zealous for the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace; if they call us provincial, let us make the world our parish as never before; if they call us selfish, let our hearts beat faster for the lost and for sharing with all men the best we have. If they say we are intolerant, let us be more eager than ever to grant to them that which is greater than tolerance. Let us ever be ready to fellowship with all who name the name of our Redeemer in sincerity and truth where there is no compromise in conviction required. If they call us reactionary, let us be more diligent to present a quality of life which our age needs. Brethren, we cannot compromise on the nature of the remedy, but we can be liberal on the rights of all mankind to have access to that remedy, regardless of color, race, station or place in life. Let us work.

I long to enter someday into the rapturous reminiscence of Paul when he exclaimed, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day; and not to me only but unto all them that love his appearing." 2. Tim. 4:7-8.

"Faith of our fathers! living still

In spite of dungeon, fire, and sword,
O how our hearts beat high with joy

When e'er we hear that glorious word,
Faith of our fathers! holy faith!

We will be true to thee till death!

"Our fathers, chained in prisons dark,
Were still in heart and conscience free!
How sweet would be their children's fate,
If they, like them, would die for thee!
Faith of our fathers! holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death.

"Faith of our fathers! we will love
Both friend and foe in all our strife;
And preach thee, too, as love knows how,
By kindly words and virtuous life:
Faith of our fathers! holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death."

Dr. W. R. White Remains in Oklahoma

Oklahoma Baptists rejoice that Dr. W. R. White is to remain as pastor of the First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, having declined the presidency of Hardin-Simmons University offered him unanimously by the trustees of that great institution. They covet the best, but we are glad that God is keeping Dr. White in Oklahoma. With one accord, the leaders of civic righteousness as well as all the constructive business forces of Oklahoma City, regardless of creed, protested his leaving. As pastor of the second largest white Baptist church in the world and the unofficial leader of our Baptist hosts, a brother beloved, he has the largest possible opportunity for service.

Two New Books

Editorial

Enroute to the Convention we picked up in Nashville two books published last week by the Sunday School Board, one of them, **Jefferson Davis Sandefer—Christian Educator**, by Inez Woodward Sandefer, wife of Dr. Sandefer's youngest son. It is one of the most fascinating biographies we have read in many a day. We thank Mrs. Sandefer for giving us such a life-like portrait of the man who for thirty years so directed Simmons College, Abilene, Texas, that it has become, as Hardin-Simmons University, one of the greatest Christian schools in America. We knew and loved "Prexy" Sandefer through those years and treasured his fellowship. He was one of the most dynamic Baptist leaders in the Southwest. He won and held the confidence and support of men, poor and rich. At the time of his Homegoing, a few weeks ago, the institution had accumulated a substantial endowment. Among the friends who made generous contributions in recent years in money or buildings—or both—were Mr. and Mrs. John G. Hardin, H. C. Coleman, C. M. Caldwell, E. L. Marston, W. P. Ferguson, Mr. and Mrs. Hart Phillips, and others who were deeply interested in Simmons. One chapter is given to the romance of Christian fellowship relating to Mr. H. C. Coleman, a Presbyterian elder of Philadelphia, who gave to Simmons, altogether, \$71,500 in cash and \$80,000 worth of property. With a business associate, Mr. Coleman was visiting Abilene some years ago and met President Sandefer. In response to his inquiries Dr. Sandefer explained that every faculty member must affirm his implicit belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures, the Virgin Birth of Jesus, his diety, blood atonement, personal resurrection, and the personal return of the Lord. Mr. Coleman became tremendously interested and his initial gift of \$1000 was followed by many similar gifts. Get this remarkable biography and read it. It has many illustrations and is attractively printed and bound (pages, 350; price, \$2.50).

* * * * *

The second book is **The Broadman Hymnal**, edited by B. B. McKinney, Music Editor of the Baptist Sunday School Board. With 563 numbers including Responsive Readings, it is the best hymnal we have ever seen. It has the best of the old and the choicest of the new. Among the distinctive features are choir selections, choice anthems, including "Hallelujah Chorus" by Handel, and "God So Loved the Word,"

by Stainer. The Responsive Readings, selected by Dr. Hight C. Moore, are arranged by titles adapted to various occasions,—the most satisfactory selection we have seen in any book. Especial attention is given to calls to worship and benedictions. We congratulate and thank Mr. McKinney and his associates for giving us such a hymnal.

In a volume of autobiographical sketches by B. J. W. Graham, entitled, "Fifty Years in the Ministry," is one in which he tells about his decision to go to school. A number of his friends had told the young preacher that he could preach better than a lot of educated preachers they had heard. Their advice confirmed him in his plan to stay in business and preach in school houses and poor churches. By invitation of the president of Carson-Newman College in Tennessee, he went up to look over the college, but he decided that he would get along without any more education. On the way back home he stopped at a Negro's house to ask the way. The Negro was well-dressed and was superlatively polite. "After he told me the way, he said: 'I presume you are a minister.' I replied, 'Yes.' Said he, 'May I ask where you were educated?' I said, 'I am not educated. You do not have to be educated to preach.' 'No, certainly not,' he said, 'but there are so many delicate shades of meaning to the Latin and Greek languages, it seems to me that a young fellow like you puts himself to great disadvantage by not acquiring a thorough knowledge of these languages.' That was just more than I could stand, and without waiting to hear more, I slapped my horse with the lines and soon he was in a sweeping trot. I had not gone fifty yards from that Negro before I said in my heart, 'I will have an education, including Latin and Greek, if it takes me twenty years to get it.' That Negro did what outstanding preachers and educators had utterly failed to do, and he did it with his personality and in just a few words. I had never seen him before. I do not know his name, and I have never seen nor heard of him since that day. But I owe him a debt I can never pay. If I knew he were living and knew the place of his residence, I would travel almost any distance to see him and to thank him for changing the current of my whole life. If I knew he were dead and knew where he was buried, it would give me pleasure to mark his grave with a stone on which would be inscribed expression of my gratitude to him."

The **Alabama Baptist** calls attention to the significant fact that one of the first steps taken by Hitler in his plans to conquer the world was to close all church schools in Germany.

Hundreds Accept Christ In Japan

Richmond, Virginia—(F.M.B.)—The following cablegram was received today (June 1) from Kokura, Japan: "At fiftieth anniversary revival 531 Seinan Jo Gakuin girls surrendered to Christ." This message was signed by Rev. Matsuta Hara, president of the school.

Marking the golden jubilee of Southern Baptists' entrance into Japan, this year has been designated as a season of special evangelistic emphasis for all Japanese Baptists. The cable announcing the salvation of 531 of the 700 girls enrolled in Southern Baptists' school for girls is the first report to be received from the all-Japan evangelistic movement.

In November Japanese Baptists will assemble for a united celebration. At that time the results of the revivals held in the 25 Southern Baptist churches and two schools will be reported. Southern Baptists in the U. S. A. are joining their prayerful interest with that of their Japanese comrades overseas by studying about Japan during the mission study year of 1940-41.