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CHRIST--THE METHOD AND THE MOTIVE

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PART III: CHRIST--THE METHOD

In a previous article we attempted to demonstrate the central place of the Person of Christ in all of God's dealing with man. "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" sums up God's message to man. No other message will meet man's need.

Similarly, when we seek for a messenger who is able to bear that message effectively to a sinner's heart, we soon learn that only Christ is adequate. No other messenger can reveal God to man.

In this present article we shall attempt to show the central place of Christ in two other areas--Christian living and Christian service. Christ is the method for Christian living, and Christ is the motive for Christian service.

Christian people generally have been led to understand that forgiveness of their sins is obtained by receiving Christ. If they have been well taught they know something about the doctrine of justification. They realize that these blessings are theirs on account of their relationship to Christ. "In Christ" they are declared to be righteous.

But unfortunately many Christians who know that they are justified by virtue of their relationship to Christ then strive to live for Christ and to serve Christ while being more or less detached from Him. They do not see that God's method for holy living and God's motive for fruitful service are centered in Christ just as much as was the first phase of their salvation.

When God provided forgiveness through Christ He also provided power to overcome sin through Christ. God's remedy for guilt is Christ's death for me. God's remedy for the practice of sin is Christ's death in me. I see the power of Christ's death revealed in His resurrection. I experience the power of Christ's death when He lives His resurrection life in me. Christian living is Christ living in me. It is not in any sense my effort to live like Him. That effort is always unsuccessful. It must be Christ Himself living His victorious life in and through me. Thus it should be evident that God's method for holy living is entirely a matter of permitting Christ to live His life in the believer.

The reader should be able to see the great gulf that exists between human ethics and victorious Christian living. The one is based on human effort, the other on God's provision. The one is man attempting to be like Christ; the other is Christ succeeding in living His life through the believer. Christ is God's provision for holy living.

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Now if the reader is living in that miserable middle-land between justification accomplished and victory realized he should know two things. First, he should know that he is not alone; millions of Christians are living in the same land. Second, he should know that there is deliverance; God has provided it in Christ. Should we not, then, be zealous in the search for the condition or conditions which God requires on our part which, when fulfilled, permit Christ to live His life in us? One of the clearest answers to our problem is to be found in the Epistle to the Romans.

Romans 1 - 5

The first five chapters of Romans show man's need for justification, and God's provision for that need through the Gospel. This provision is received by faith, and one is saved when he believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. This experience is basic to our study, but we assume that the reader is already justified.

Romans 6

Four key words sum up the teaching of this chapter: know, reckon, yield, and obey.

First, one must know certain facts concerning his relationship to Christ and how God uses that relationship to produce the Christ-life in the believer (vss. 3, 6, 9, 16). One must know the simple story of the Gospel in order to be saved, and one must know something about union with Christ in order to be sanctified. Study the facts as to how you are united to Christ by faith, and how God uses that relationship to give power over sin.

Second, we must reckon (vs. 11) these facts to be true of us personally. This is not once for all, but continuous. We must keep telling ourselves that we are one with Him in every experience.

Third, we must yield (vss. 13, 16, 19) or present ourselves completely to God to be made holy. God cannot cleanse an unwilling heart. Christ cannot control an unyielded life. "And the Greek tense suggests a definite act, once for all, not a gradual process" (A.J. McClain).¹ When we know the facts, and reckon them to be true of ourselves, then a definite act of the will in complete surrender to the will of God is called for. If we rebel here there can be no further progress.

Fourth, we must obey (vss. 12, 16, 17). This will be relatively and increasingly easy if the surrender has been total. It will be the outworking of a great decision.

Of these four steps the first and second are preliminary. The great decision comes in the third step, followed by a fourth step of working out that decision. It would seem that steps three and four present us with the need of a crisis, followed by a continuing process.

This is well stated by Evan H. Hopkins: "The blessing is both instantaneous and progressive . . . Sanctification in the sense of conformity to the life and character of Christ is a process, a gradual process, a continuous process, an endless process. But sanctification in the sense of a definite decision for holiness, a thorough and whole-hearted dedication to God, the committal of the whole being to Him, is a crisis; and the crisis must take place before we really know the process. Before you can draw a line you must begin with a point. The line is the process, the point is the crisis."²

As a matter of experience, this essential crisis is often a second blessing as revolutionary as conversion itself. Norman Grubb explains: "For most of us this deeper revelation of union has to come as a second experience. . . It is not that there are two separate salvations. . . The twofoldness is not on His side. But for most of us there has to be a twofold appropriation of the two great deliverances that stream from the one Calvary."³

It would seem, then, that there is nothing on God's part which would hinder these two experiences taking place at once--the crisis of conversion and the crisis of complete surrender. But in practice, usually the convert does not "know" and he does not "reckon" so he is not prepared for this second crisis experience. Consequently, the process of obedience cannot begin. And the saved person is trying to live the Christian life in his own strength, apart from the power of the cross and the empty tomb. Should this be the reader's position, he must go back and take up where he left off. He must know, reckon, yield, and obey--in that order.

Romans 7

The end of chapter 6 brings us to the end of the "right way" of sanctification, according to the usual teaching. However, observation and experience both remind us that often the Christian tries sincerely to follow these four steps, only to live a defeated life. Along with this experience, our study of other portions of the Word tell us that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is essential in sanctification, yet this is not presented in chapter 6. Again, other portions of the Word teach us that sanctification is received by faith, but this also is lacking in Romans 6. Can it be that Romans gives us only part of the method, essential factors being entirely omitted? We believe that the rest of the Book of Romans continues to show us God's method of sanctifying the believer through the person of Jesus Christ. However, this is not to deny that the remaining chapters have other values as well. They do reveal the story of Israel and other valuable truths.

The point we are insisting upon is that the method of sanctification continues to be revealed throughout all the remaining chapters of the book. To be specific, we believe that chapter 7 was written to warn us not to place our confidence where there is no strength. We may know, reckon, yield, and sincerely try to obey, yet if we are looking in the wrong place for strength to obey we may fail miserably. Misplaced confidence usually leads to failure and disillusionment.

First, the apostle warns us against the inability of the Law (vss. 1-4). Most Christians know this, though some do not. The Christian is "dead to the law," the Law having no further part in his sanctification. The Christian therefore should place no confidence in the Law as an instrument to make him holy. He is to be made holy through the work of an indwelling Person.

Second, we are warned against the inability of the flesh (vs. 18). The Law is outside us, the flesh is inside, but both are powerless to produce holiness. The flesh is that part of the believer which he had by natural birth and which is wholly evil. This includes the natural will, natural morality, common decency, love for the beautiful, everything that man is by nature. The Christian still has this nature, but it will never help him one bit to become Christlike.

Third, we are warned about the inability of the new nature (vss. 18b, 22-23). Many people can readily understand points one and two, but are utterly confused by this third point. They suppose that the new birth gives them a new nature which is wholly good and all-powerful. The new

These are essentials if the Spirit is to work, and His work is essential to our sanctification. But just how does the Holy Spirit produce the Christlife in us? We want to know what we may expect Him to be doing, and God tells us in the next chapter.

Romans 9

When the Holy Spirit is given freedom to work He begins immediately to attack the self-life, the unbent I. Each point of self-life must be dealt with as it is revealed. This is the endless process by which the Christlife is produced.

L. E. Maxwell states it clearly: "The victorious believer will become aware of many forms of self which must yet be dealt with. We shall discover: In our service for Christ, self-confidence and self-esteem; in the slightest suffering, self-saving and self-pity; in the least misunderstanding, self-defense and self-vindication; in our station in life, self-seeking and self-centeredness; in the smallest trials, self-inspection and self-accusation; in the daily routine, self-pleasing and self-choosing; in our relationships, self-assertiveness and self-respect; in our education, self-boasting and self-expression; in our desires, self-indulgence and self-satisfaction; in our successes, self-admiration and self-congratulations; in our failures, self-excusing and self-justification; in our spiritual attainments, self-righteousness and self-complacency; in our public ministry, self-reflection and self-glory; in life as a whole, self-live and selfishness."¹⁰

Paul learned to judge self at the cross where self was forgotten in sacrifice for others (vss. 1-3). He was even willing to be separated from Christ if that could bring about the salvation of his people. Man could not go further than that in complete self-abnegation. The Law, the flesh, the new nature cannot produce that kind of sanctification. Only the Spirit of God, working in man the mind of Christ, can produce Christian living like that. Self cannot cast out self. Only the Spirit of God is able to deal with the self-life. We must be on right terms with Him. We must let Him break us.

Romans 10

Like all the other blessings given to man by God, sanctification must be received by faith. Chapter 10 gives illustrations of various blessings so received (9:30-33, which belongs to chapter 10; 10:6-11, 17). But we were not ready to take sanctification by faith until we reached this point. Faith must have an object in the promises of God, and we had no promise of sanctification until we met God's terms. The great hindrance to faith is self-effort, and until this had been given up there could be no valid faith.

So let us see. Are we ready to claim God's promise?

1. Do we know the truth about our union with Christ?
2. Do we reckon this relationship to be true of us personally?
3. Have we reached a crisis in which we have yielded ourselves to God without reservation?
4. Is it our will to obey the will of God? Yet have we sensed a need of power?
5. Are we in right relationship to the Holy Spirit, not grieving or quenching Him, but walking by means of Him? (ch. 8).
6. Have we permitted the Spirit to break us so that we place no value even on our lives except as they relate to the glory of God? (ch. 9).
7. Have we taken the victory by faith? (ch. 10).

Then continue to receive God's provision by a moment-by-moment appropriation of God's provision for a holy life. The result will be Christ living in you.

PART IV: CHRIST--THE MOTIVE

Romans 11

At the end of chapter 11 (in 12:1-2) Paul states the divine purpose of this chapter. It is to supply the motive which is to move us to action. We already know the Message, Christ and Him crucified. We know the only Messenger who can reveal God to man. We know the Method by which God sanctifies the believer. But God is not satisfied when we merely know the truth. He wants to stir us to action. There is a God to glorify, and there is a lost world to save.

According to Romans 12:1-2 God wants us to do three things: He wants us to present our bodies--a crisis; He wants us to be transformed--a process; but He also wants us to demonstrate in our lives the whole will of God--a service. Chapters 12-16 reveal that perfect will of God in holiness and service which has been God's objective throughout the Epistle.

But God cannot move us to action merely by the exercise of His power, or by His commandments. He must make us want to be holy and useful. He must appeal to us through a motive. What motive shall He choose to be most effective?

The highest possible motives are those which center in Christ and God. As Christ is our Message, our Messenger, and our Method, so He should be our Motive as well. We should respond to God's appeal for Christ's sake. We should serve God because of Christ.

From the motives which center in Christ, God selects one, "the mercies of God." "I beseech you" on what basis? On the basis of "the mercies of God." God appeals to Christians to be sanctified and to serve Him because He has shown His mercy toward us through Christ.

Paul states the same thing elsewhere: "At any rate there has been no selfish motive. The very spring of our actions is the love of Christ. We look at it like this: if one died for all men then, in a sense, they all died, and his purpose in dying for them is that their lives should now be no longer lived for themselves but for him who died and rose again for them" (II Cor. 5:13-15, Phillips). God would challenge us to live for Him on the basis of His mercies shown to us in Christ. This is the motive to which God appeals. And if we are truly grateful for His mercies we will do what He asks us to do. We will live holy lives and render fruitful service.

Incidentally, we believe this determines the purpose of chapter 11. Rather than being a part of a parenthesis (chapters 9-11) it would seem to be the setting up of the basis for the appeal in chapter 12. Chapter 11 is full of instances of the mercies of God to Israel and to the church. The word "mercy" occurs 10 times in chapters 9-11, and not at all previously. God's whole appeal is based upon His mercies, and those mercies are recounted in chapters 9-11. It hardly seems right to us, therefore, to make these chapters a parenthesis. Chapter 11 is essential in its place, to remind us of the mercies of God given to us in Christ. The history of Israel may be the subject matter of these chapters, but we believe God's purpose was to reveal His mercies rather than to relate that history. The history is the illustration of the mercies of God. God's character, not

Israel's history, is the greater revelation. And this is the basis of the appeal; this is the motive God proposes to Christians.

Though this is a very high motive, because it centers in Christ, yet we do not believe it is the highest one. It would seem that the glory of God, regardless of whether we receive mercy from Him or not, is a higher motive. To glorify God "though He slay me" is a higher motive than gratitude for blessings received. If this is true, then it establishes a principle which we should like to develop, the principle that God is willing to use lesser, lower motives when we do not respond to higher ones. God is so much concerned about the salvation of sinners and the accomplishing of His will in the world that He is willing to use any legitimate motive that could possibly move us to action. Preferring higher motives, of course, and using them whenever our spiritual condition warrants their use, yet He is willing to come down to the level on which we live to appeal for holiness and service.

For example, God will use motives which center in others rather than in Christ. When He steps down to this level He still prefers to confine the appeal to the spiritual and eternal welfare of others. So although it is not the highest motive, God will appeal for missionaries and missionary offerings on the basis of the pitiable condition of the heathen who do not know Christ.

Paul used this motive. Besides his debt to Christ he recognized a debt to the heathen, and he was willing to preach the Gospel to them in order to discharge that debt (Rom. 1:14-15). Again, he sought "the profit of many, that they may be saved" (1 Cor. 10:33).

Love and pity should move us to action. Our sympathy with the lost should make us better witnesses. This is not the highest motive, but it is a legitimate motive. And we should use it, either instead of, or supplementary to, the motives which center in Christ.

There are still other motives which center in others, motives which are lower; and yet our Lord Himself used them. Again and again the Gospel records tell us that He was "moved with compassion" for their physical needs as well as for their spiritual needs. The suffering of human beings always moved Him to action. His primary interest in men's souls was not used as an excuse for not ministering to their bodies. This is a dangerous tendency among Evangelicals. Compassion should move Christians as it moved Christ.

God is not through stepping down yet. Though some may say that the only legitimate motives are those which center in God and in others, that is not the teaching of the Word. God is not above appealing to motives which center in ourselves. Of course, again, He begins on the spiritual and eternal level. Reward in heaven is one of the most frequently used motives in the Word, even though it is down on the "self" level. God wants to get His work done, and if we live so low that only benefits to ourselves can move us, then God appeals to us on that level.

"Great is your reward in heaven," said Jesus. Again He appealed: "Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven." He promised: "Then he shall reward every man according to his works." And again: "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." To the rich young ruler He promised, "Thou shalt have treasure in heaven." Paul's references to the judgment seat of Christ all are based on this motive.

It is most humiliating to learn that God is forced to come down one more step to be able to reach many of us. We want rewards, but we are unwilling to wait to receive them in heaven. "Pie in the sky bye and bye" does not move us. Eternal rewards do not appeal to our carnal hearts. So down God comes. He even promises us rewards here and now if we will only live holy lives and serve Him faithfully. Jesus promised us both present and eternal rewards: "There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting" (Luke 18:29-30). Many of the promises found in the Word offer present blessings for obedience.

This is the lowest level possible. It is all selfish and immediate. It promises rewards here and now. This is the trained animal level. The trainer must give small portions of meat or fish almost constantly to reward the animal for continuing his act. And our God is so determined to make Christians holy and to reach a lost world with the Gospel that He is willing to meet us on this level. He will toss to us daily little extra blessings and honors to keep us in His service.

And even yet, the vast majority of professing Christians are not active in serving God.

But before we start pointing fingers let us ask ourselves--

Do we work as hard without a Sunday School contest as with one?

Do we do better when praised by men?

Would we work better for more money?

If we were appreciated more would we serve better?

Do you rejoice at the fall of rivals in God's work?

Would you win more souls at \$1,000 a head?

With all these motives in effect, how much are you doing for Christ?

What is the highest level on which God can effectively appeal to you?

When you bargain with God to labor for Him, what are your demands? What are the conditions under which you will work? What must He do for you? Are not the mercies of God, already received, sufficient?

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2. Herbert F. Stevenson, Keswick's Authentic Voice, (Zondervan), p. 332.
3. Norman Grubb, The Liberating Secret, (Christian Literature Crusade), p. 74.
4. William Culbertson, God's Provision for Holy Living, (Moody Press), p. 86.
5. Grubb, op. cit., p. 96.
6. Andrew Murray, Absolute Surrender, (Moody Press), p. 74.
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