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CHAPTER 2: A PURE GOSPEL

ACTS 26:15-20 – *"And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."*

THE second indispensable condition we are going to note this afternoon, to Aggressive Christianity, is a Pure Gospel. I mean by that, God's own pure metal, the unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ.

There seems, now-a-days, in the Church and the world, as many different views of the Gospel as there are of secondary matters and of minor doctrines. One person has one notion of the Gospel, another has another, until there has come to be a fearful distraction in the minds of many who are constantly listening to what is called the Gospel. May God the Holy Ghost help us this afternoon to look at it impartially and carefully.

And, firstly, let me try to define what is the Gospel. "Oh!" people say, "it is good news." Yes, thank God, it is good news, indeed—news without which we must all have been lost. It is the news of the free, measureless, undeserved, reconciling mercy of God, offered to me through the vicarious, infinite, glorious sacrifice of His Son, to the end that I may BE SAVED from sin here and from hell hereafter!! But this news involves a great deal. It is the news of a definite, practical end, involving conditions; for even good news to me involves certain conditions on my part, if I am to procure the good which the news brings. Then, secondly, I will try to explain the conditions on which the Gospel is available to me.

Let me illustrate this; and I am particularly anxious that you should all understand me. Supposing that a province of this empire were in rebellion against our Sovereign. Supposing that the people of that province had trampled under foot our laws, and set up their own in opposition; and suppose



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the Queen, in her gracious clemency, desired not to destroy these rebels, but to save them, what would be the necessary and indispensable condition in the very nature of the case, in order for her to save them? Not merely a proclamation of pardon. That would be a glorious movement towards the result, but there would want something else; for a proclamation of pardon merely, whilst the rebels remained in an unchanged state, would only be giving them greater facilities for further rebellion. Evidently, in the nature of the case, it is a necessity that a change of mind should be produced in the rebels themselves, for the Queen not only wants to save them from destruction, but to restore them to allegiance and obedience to herself, and, unless she does this, they will never become dutiful and obedient subjects. There will never be anything but anarchy, confusion, and rebellion in that province unless those rebels undergo a change of mind. They must be brought back to allegiance and obedience to the Queen.

Just so with God's proclamation of salvation. The mischief is in us. Take the illustration of the Prodigal Son. The mischief was all in him—not in his father. The father loved him before he went away, and the father loved him afterwards. The father's benevolent heart yearned over him all the time he was away, and many a time, perchance, he went to the roof of his house to look over the expanse of country over which the rebellious lad had gone and wondered whether he would ever come back. The father's heart was yearning over him all the time. How was it that he could not be reinstated in the father's love and in the family privileges? Because there needed a change of heart—a change of mind in him. If he had come back to the old homestead with the same rebellious spirit in him, the same desire to be free from the father's oversight, the same unwillingness to be put under the FATHER'S DOMINION and DISCIPLINE, he would still have been a rebel and a prodigal. In the very nature of the case, until there was the necessary change, a wise and righteous father could not pardon him; he must insist, though he loves him dearly, upon a certain change of mind before he can consistently pardon him.

Just so. The laws of mind are the same when operated upon by either God or man. This is not laying any necessity upon God any more than He has laid upon Himself. He has made us with a certain mental constitution, and therefore He must adapt the conditions and means of our salvation to that mental constitution, otherwise He would reflect upon His own wisdom in having given it to us at the first. Therefore when he purposes to save man He must save him as man—not as a beast or a machine!

He must save him as man, and he must propound such a scheme as will fit and adapt itself to man's



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nature. Just as the father might not pardon the prodigal, irrespective of the prodigal's state of mind and heart, so neither can God pardon the sinner irrespective of the state of his mind and heart.

I know, by personal contact with hundreds of souls, that there is an alarming amount of misunderstanding and of what I consider false apprehension of the Gospel of Christ at this point. Hence, you have speakers saying, without anything to guard or qualify their words, 'Only believe, and you shall be saved.'

'Whosoever believeth hath everlasting life.' Blessed and glorious truth, when rightly applied, and applied to the right characters; but dangerous error, in my opinion, when applied indiscriminately to unawakened, unrepenting, rebellious sinners. I have met with disastrous consequences of this all over the land—so disastrous that I would not like to repeat them here. Now, I say, we should be careful to let the people understand what we mean by the Gospel: I dare not do any other. I am so satisfied of the thousands of souls that are deceived at this point, that, while God gives me voice to speak, I dare not but try to warn them, and show them their fatal mistake.

Returning to our illustration—you say, 'The man is, so to speak, dead in trespasses and sins. How can he see his own error? How can he lay down the weapons of rebellion? How can he, by himself, come back to the Father?' Granted. Hence, God, in His wisdom and love, has provided for that incapacity which man has induced by his rebellion, by the gift of His Spirit. You say, 'The parallel is not perfect between your illustration and the thing illustrated.' No, it is not in that point; because temporal rebels can find out by themselves the insanity and wickedness of their course. They can see where it will lead them. They can see the destructive consequences, and be sorry for the course they have taken. They can lay down their weapons of rebellion, and they can conform to the conditions on which the Queen issues her proclamation. You say, 'Yes, that they can do, but this man cannot.' Of course, because he has so hardened his heart that even if he can, he never will without the Holy Spirit of God. Hence, God has taken compassion on us, and sent His Spirit into the world for this purpose—'To convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.' Thus He opens our eyes, and shows us our lost estate. Having, by the Holy Ghost, made us realize our desperate condition, then comes the Gospel to meet us just where we are, on condition that we abandon our evil ways, and do the works meet for repentance, which we are able to do by the power of the Holy Spirit, as well as to lay down the weapons of our rebellion and accept of Christ, put our neck under his yoke, and pledge ourselves in heart to FOLLOW HIM ALL THE DAYS OF OUR LIFE. These are the conditions involved, and this is the end the Gospel contemplates, and there you see the Gospel



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accomplishes its END in this case. The heart of the rebel is won back to its Lord, and the indispensable change has taken place in the being himself. He has come back to God. His eyes are opened to see the evil of sin, and the desperate state he is in. Tired of himself, and tired of his evil ways, as the Prodigal was of the swine-yard, he arises, leaves them and goes to his father.

But now I must stop to meet a difficulty which I know will arise in many sincere minds. I feel myself such a tender jealousy for the glory of God, that I do highly respect this feeling in others, and if anyone disagrees with my views, or my way of putting them, through a feeling of jealousy for the glory of God, they have my profound respect. You will say, "If we are able to abandon our evil courses, and lay down the weapons of rebellion, is that not saving ourselves?" No, dear friends; it is altogether different. You see it is the indispensable condition of salvation in everyone of the nine passages we read, and in many others—that we abandon our evil ways. Now, what does that mean? A gentleman in a letter to me said, 'We cannot save ourselves from heart sins.' Granted; but we can will to be saved from them. Then, there is a great distinction between those sins of the heart, which are involuntary, and those deliberate transgressions of God's law, which unregenerate men commit. God requires me to abandon all that I CAN, as a condition of salvation, and then, when He saves, He will give me power to abandon all that I could; not before. The Prodigal had to come away from the swine-yard, the filth, and the husks, before he got into the father's house, and sat down at the father's feast, but when he had done so, then the father said, 'Come in,' and he brought the best robe and put it on him and killed the fatted calf, and put the ring of forgiveness upon his hand. Hence, as the old divines used to put it, "You must wait for the Lord in the path of His ordinances," the path of obedience, as far as is possible to you. And is there any other way? Can the drunkard wait for Him while he abides at his cup? Can the thief wait for Him while he continues in his diabolical trade? Can any man indulging in absolute open sin find the Lord? Must he not, as the Saviour says, cut off that right hand, and pluck out that right eye? He never can cleanse his guilt, but he CAN cut off his hand, and when he does that, then the Holy Spirit will come in and apply the Blood, and do the cleansing.

Therefore, you perceive, I take the Gospel to be aiming not merely at saving, but restoring us. If it were merely to save me without restoring me, what would it do for me? As a moral agent, if the Gospel fails to PUT ME RIGHT it will fail eternally to make me happy; and if you were to transplant me before the throne, and put me down in the inner circle of archangels with a sense of wrong in my heart, being morally out of harmony with the laws of God, and the moral laws of the universe, I should be as miserable as if I were in hell, and should want to get away. I must be MADE RIGHT, as well as treated as if I were right. I must be changed as well as justified. This is the Gospel put as



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clearly in our text as it could be, and also the Epistles written by the Apostle Paul, the great expounder of the doctrine of justification by faith. It was through the lips of the glorified Lord Himself, after He had risen, to the great Apostle of the Gentiles, after the Gospel dispensation was fully opened, that this most unmistakable commission was given, "Unto whom now I send thee to open their eyes." What to? Their sins. As Peter opened the eyes of the murderers of our Lord, on the Day of Pentecost, "Whom ye have crucified and slain," driving in the convicting truth of God until, in their agony, they cried out, "WHAT MUST WE DO?" He tore off the bandages which Satan had wrapped around them, and drove them as with the schoolmaster's lash, until he drove them to the Cross of the crucified One. "Open their eyes," that is the first thing. Oh! how my soul has often shrunk and wept under the sense of the awful responsibility this brings upon us Christians. The world is asleep. Yes, friends, your relations, your neighbours—they are asleep. They are preoccupied. They are full of the world, and the things of the world. They will not think—they will not see—they will not look into the Word of Life. Your responsibility comes here tenfold. GO AND WAKE THEM! You CAN DO IT! if you have the Holy Ghost in you!

Some people would have said to the Lord Jesus,

"What a great deal you are making of human agency, for, after all, Paul is but a man, and you are setting him to open the eyes of the unconverted, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Are you not making too much of human effort?" But the Lord Jesus knew what He was about. He knew that Paul had a power in him which every really renewed child of God has—the Holy Ghost to equip him for this work; and He says,

"Unto whom now I send thee to open their eyes." Go and awake them to a sense of their danger. Take them, metaphorically speaking, by the collar and shake them and make them realize their peril, as you would if they were asleep in a burning house!! And then when you have awakened them, what are you to do? Leave them alone? No, no, for Christ's sake, no! Take hold of them by the mighty power of your moral suasion and zeal, and love, and energy, and turn them right round from sin and Satan unto God.

Jesus Christ set Paul to do this, and Paul did it. He says, "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." His was no meek and mild putting of the truth, and leaving people to do as they liked. "Knowing, therefore, the TERROR of the Lord, we PERSUADE men, because we thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead;" and, oh! what success the Lord gave him in his desperate



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enterprise. What multitudes did he persuade, and succeed in turning round from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God! Turn them round! 'Oh! but,' you say, 'if they are turned round from darkness, which represents evil, to light, which represents righteousness, are they not saved?' No, not yet. This is only the change effected in their will, which is beautifully exemplified by Paul in Romans vii.—willing to keep the law, willing to obey God, willing to do His will, and follow Him; yea, struggling, but yet unable; though they are brought round from the voluntary choice or embrace of evil, and the voluntary service of the Devil, round to the voluntary choice and embrace of righteousness and the service of God, they are not yet able to do it.

Now, friends, don't say I said they were able. Don't misrepresent me, as some people do. I will try to be clear, and I say there is all the difference in the world between BEING WILLING TO LET JESUS CHRIST SAVE ME FROM MY SINS, AND SAVING MYSELF FROM THEM. It is exactly this change in the attitude of the will which God demands as a CONDITION OF THE EXERCISE OF HIS POWER. It is so in all the miracles. "Wilt thou be made whole?" He says to the man with the withered hand, "Stretch out thy hand." The man might have said, 'Lord, what an unreasonable request. Are you come to mock me in my misery?' Oh! but Jesus Christ knew what He wanted in the man. He wanted the response of the MAN'S WILL. He wanted the man to say, 'Yes, Lord;' and when He said that, the Lord put the strength into the shoulder-bone, and He stretched it out, and it was made whole. There are many souls just there—they will not say, 'Yes, Lord,' to some condition which the Spirit puts upon them. I could give you some heartrending illustrations on this point. I am satisfied that this Gospel-enlightened England of ours is full of people just at this point, who come crying, and praying, and longing, as they call it, after God. They come up to Jesus Christ again and again. They try to believe; they want to follow Him, but they are kept back by the right hand and the right eye which the Holy Ghost has told them they must cut off and pluck out before He will receive them. They will not do it, and so they are ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. You must renounce evil in your will. You must will to "obey the truth." You must say, 'Yes, Lord.'

I remember, on one occasion, in the West of England, I had been delivering week-day morning addresses. We had a blessed meeting on this particular day. We began at half-past ten, and the Lord was so with us that He supplied the want of refreshment till we had it at 5.30. He made up for the want of dinner or tea. A gentleman was there, with whose appearance I was struck. He was tall, and intelligent, a man of about forty or forty-five. He knelt down without any emotion, more than deep solemnity, at the end of the Communion rail. I had been talking about the reason people walked in darkness—controversy with the Holy Spirit. I said to him, 'My dear sir, have you had a `controversy



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with the Holy Spirit?' 'Yes,' he said. 'I have had one for fifteen years. I am ashamed to say it, and it has eaten up all the joy and power of my Christian life, and I have been a useless cumberer of the ground.' I did not know till afterwards that he was a deacon of the church, and had come up there in the sight of all the congregation. I said, 'Well, my dear sir, you know the Gospel as well as I do. It is of no use to preach faith to you until you are willing to renounce your idol.' He said, most emphatically, 'I know it.' I said, 'Are you willing?' Oh, with what tenacity the human heart holds on to its idols! Though he had come up to the rail in the face of that congregation, so deeply was he under the power of the Spirit, yet he hesitated. I said, 'Well, my dear sir, you must make up your mind. In your case, it is between the choice of this, whatever it may be, and Christ;' and I retired under the pulpit pillars for a minute, and left him to himself and the Lord. I lifted up my heart to God for him, and then I went back, and said, 'Will you renounce it?' and, lifting up his eyes to heaven, and, bringing his hand down upon the Communion rail, he said, 'By the grace of God, I do,' and his whole frame heaved with agony, but he stepped into immediate liberty. His blessed Saviour was waiting with arms wide open. There was only this accursed thing which had stood between them, and when he trampled it under his feet, and was willing to forsake it, as a natural consequence, he sprang into the everlasting arms, and received the assurance of salvation. It was all over the town for the next fortnight. People remarked, 'Did you ever see such a change come over a man, as has come over Mr. So-and-so; he is like a new man. He prays in the prayer-meeting with such fervour. He was at the chapel doors, speaking to the unconverted, and inviting them to come back. He is visiting up and down the town—why, he's a new man!' Was there any change in the Gospel? Had he received any fresh light? It was only the old story—only that he had put away the idol, and trampled under foot that which was keeping the life-power of God out of his soul.

Here is another case. At some services in the West of England, a gentleman, largely interested in an unlawful business, came every night for five weeks, and used to sit there, the picture of despair and wretchedness, till after ten o'clock. He went on in this way until his friends thought he would lose his reason. He was walking about his bedroom with his Bible open, kneeling down every now and then, struggling and wrestling and trying to believe; but every time he thought of this ungodly business which he could not give up, despair seized him, for he thought of his money—he thought of the consequences to his family; until at last he said, 'Money or no money, I will settle it.' He gave it up, came out, and got saved at once.

Now I think these illustrations make clear what I mean, by the abandonment, the turning from the embrace of evil to the embrace of righteousness as an indispensable condition of forgiveness.



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Hence the Holy Ghost has carefully maintained this order 'to open their eyes and to turn them (round) from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in me.' You see what a different thing this is to presenting Christ to people just as they are, where they are, doing what they like. You see what a different Gospel it comes to, insisting upon a thorough renouncement and abandonment of evil as a condition of Jesus Christ receiving the sinner. This was Paul's Gospel. Will you give me any other definition of it? Can you explain it in any other way? Paul goes on to show us, how he understood: Whereupon, Oh! King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision, but shewed first unto them of Damascus and at Jerusalem and then to the Gentiles, they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." Was this like saying, "Only believe?" without respect to any antecedent change of mind? Can anybody show me anything here in the slightest degree approximating to the Antinomian Gospel which has been grafted on to some other of Paul's utterances? And yet surely the Apostle could not contradict himself. His writings about faith must be in harmony with this most unmistakable putting of the Gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. Moreover, did he tell Agrippa and Festus to believe? No, he left them trembling at his words, because they were not willing to abandon their sins and put away the accursed thing; but to the Philippian gaoler, who said, "Men and brethren, what must I do?" and who brought them out and began to wash their stripes, thus doing works meet for repentance at once, he said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Ah; my friend, you may try to get hold of Christ to your dying hour and at the last be lost, while you are holding on to your idols. If he could have saved us after that fashion, we needed no Christ, we could have gone into heaven without a Saviour; but He came to save His people from their sins, and while you are in love with your sins, you may struggle and tremble as Agrippa and Felix did, and as the young Ruler did, and you will meet a similar fate. You must let go your idols and be willing that Jesus should come and save you; not down among the dirt and mud of sin, but lift you out of it; wash you, make you clean, and keep you clean: circumcise your hearts; and put His law in them; and then you shall know the gladness of His salvation!

I have some people writing to me in this condition. If they are here this afternoon, let me say to them—This is what you have to do—let go your idols and say as the gentleman said of whom I have told you, 'Poverty or no poverty, business or no business, position or no position, suffering or prosperity; never mind—Christ, Christ, I let go all for Thee!'

Have you forsaken evil? Have you cut off the right hand? Have you plucked out the right eye? I have



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people coming to me in services of this character, groaning and sometimes worn to skeletons. They tell me they are in distress, they have got into bondage, they want the joy of the Lord and His daily fellowship; and when I ask the reason, they generally say, 'Well, I don't know, but it seems to be want of faith.' Now, I say to such people:

'Now let us see what this want of faith arises from.' There must be a cause. I am afraid that sin lieth at the door, and when we come to close quarters, we generally find there is some idol, some course of conduct, or some doubtful conduct which keeps God out of the soul, and when this is confessed and renounced people get the presence of God and go away rejoicing in Him. It is so in nearly every case. God does not arbitrarily withdraw Himself from His people. He wants to dwell with them. We are His proper abode. He has promised to come and abide with his people, and if He does not, depend upon it there is something in the temple offensive to Him, something with which he will not dwell. Will you put that away, and consecrate your hearts this day unto the Lord to be His temple, His temple only, and leave consequences with Him? He will be able to look after His own.

Then, lastly, when you have come to this decision, then look and live; take the final leap into the arms of a crucified Saviour. With some souls who have been the subjects of the drawings of the Spirit for years, the difficulty is in the surrendering of their wills. They have learned to reason with God; they have lost the little children's way; they are afraid to take the final leap, and there they stand before the Cross, not conscious of anything between them and Christ. What are you to do? What Paul told the Philippian gaoler to do: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ;" and you say, "What is that, and how am I to believe?" Wonderful how it has got mystified! Believe what? That He just means what He says; and that when you come, He does receive—not He will tomorrow, nor He did yesterday, but that He does now, this moment. When did He receive the sinners who came to Him on earth? When they came. Just the same will He receive you. 'Oh, but,' you say, 'I do not feel right.' No, of course not. Do you not see, you are to be saved by faith. If you are to be saved by faith, you must exercise faith before you will be saved. If it is by faith you are to be saved, you must believe first, and be saved afterwards; if it is only the next second! 'But,' you say, 'I do not feel it.' No, but you will feel it when you have got it. You must believe it before you get it, on the testimony of His Word, "I will in no wise cast you out;" "Him that cometh;" 'Now I come, Lord, I come. I have put away my idols; I have put away everything that consciously stood between me and Thee. I will to serve Thee, I will to follow Thee, I will to put my neck under Thy yoke for ever, asking no more questions, but being willing for Thee to lead me whithersoever Thou wilt. Now, Lord, I come—Thou dost receive.' Leap off the poor old stranded wreck of your own effort, or your own righteousness, or your own sinfulness, or your



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own unworthiness, or anything else of your own, into the glorious lifeboat. It is on the top of the wave this afternoon—another step, and you will be in—one bound, and you will feel the loving arms of your Saviour around you. Faith is trust, TRUST. He will do for you what He promised. Believe that God does now accept you wholly for the sake of the sacrifice of His blessed Son; that He justifies you freely from all things from which you could not be justified by the law. You stand a condemned, guilty, hell-bound criminal, and nothing but His free, sovereign mercy can save you. Throw yourself upon this, and the moment you do so in real faith you will be saved. Perhaps you will say, as a curate of the Church of England, writing to me last week said, 'I refuse to be saved by logic.' Amen, amen. So did I, and I struggled for six weeks because I refused to be saved by logic—because I would have a living, personal Christ. I admire your decision, my brother, if you are here, but let this logic help you: nevertheless, Jesus Christ has promised, if I come, that He will receive me—then, I do come, and He does receive me, for He cannot lie. Let that help you. Faith is not logic, but logic may help faith.

Oh! how I should rejoice if some of you were to launch into the arms of Jesus this afternoon. It often happens that while I am speaking souls do get into the ark of God's mercy, and come, or write to tell me afterwards that the Spirit has come, and he is crying "Abba Father," and now they KNOW they have passed from death unto life. They don't want logic then. It is a matter of demonstration with them. When you have come up to the place where saving faith is possible to you, you have no more to do, no more to suffer, no more to pay. By simple trust we are saved. This is the way every saint on earth was saved. This is the way every saint in glory was saved. This is the way we are kept saved too, by LIVING DAILY, OBEDIENT FAITH. The Lord help you just now. Let the idol go. Put away the ungodly companion. Give up the unlawful business, or the worldly conformity. Put away whatever has stood between you and Jesus. Trample it under foot and press through the crowd of difficulties as the woman did, and go right up and touch Him with this touch of faith, and you shall LIVE and KNOW THAT YOU ARE HEALED. Then this Gospel will be good news indeed to you, and Jesus will be the author of eternal salvation to you, because you OBEY HIM!

From a series of lectures given by Catherine Booth in 1880.