

Made New

"For many years I thought I was a Christian when in fact I was not. It was only later I came to see that I had never been a Christian and became one. But I was a member of a church and attended my church and its services regularly."

Such is the testimony of a young doctor. Why did he speak as he did? For two reasons: (1) his personal experience, and (2) the teaching found in the Bible.

Experience

Although brought up in a respectable family he became increasingly aware his life was driven not so much by external as by internal influences. The more he probed his actions and

motives the more he saw the ruling principle of his heart was self-centredness and self-interest. And the more he analysed the character and nature of that ruling principle the more he became convinced he was not in a right relationship with God.

He also recognized he could do nothing to effect a change. Self-will dominated and reigned supreme within. It was proof positive he had a fallen nature. He was not what he ought to be. But he knew he was not alone. All human beings are the same. Put simply we do not love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (*see Deuteronomy 6.5 & Matthew 22.37*). That means we are sinners. We are those who miss the mark of being what God wants us to be. We fall short of doing his will. We break his law.

It does not matter how respectable a person is. If he does not love God and live entirely to his glory he sins. Sin, the apostle John reminds us, is lawlessness (*1 John 3.4*). What is lawlessness? It is opposition to God's will. It is the exact opposite of what God desires.

Scripture

One reason then why the young doctor came to see he was not a Christian was the awareness he had of the ruling principle in his heart . But how did this awareness dawn upon him? The written word of God, the Bible, provides the explanation. As well as being challenged by what he read in the Bible, he found it teaches what mankind is by nature. We are dead in our sins (*Ephesians 2.3-5*). We are hostile to God (*Romans 8.7*).

Need

Experience and Scripture point to a salutary fact: mankind is unable to change himself. He cannot make himself right with God. Try as hard as we will, without God effecting a radical change within us, we remain spiritually dead and hostile to God.

Each person needs to come to an awareness of these facts. Some may do so quickly or even suddenly. Many do so over time. That seems to have been the case with the young doctor. Church going and respect for things Christian were part of his childhood experience. However the

more he delved into the teaching and claims of Jesus Christ, and the more he grew in his knowledge of the Bible, the more he realised he was not a Christian. Put another way, he came to see that he had not experienced the new birth of which Jesus spoke to Nicodemus (*John 3*).

New

In the providence of God he was made new. He sought the Lord. The Lord came down upon him, and the Holy Spirit wrought a transformation within him. This is how he describes the change brought about by God:

I am a Christian solely and entirely because of the grace of God and not because of anything that I have thought or said or done. He brought me to know that I was dead, 'dead in trespasses and sins', a slave to the world, the flesh, and the devil, that in me 'dwells no good thing', and that I was under the wrath of God and heading for eternal punishment.

He brought me to see that the real cause of all my troubles and ills, and that of

all men, was an evil fallen nature which hated God and loved sin. My trouble was not only that I did things that were wrong, but that I myself was wrong at the very centre of my being.

Emphasis

The change God made in his life was profound. Once he was in a right relationship with God his passionate concern and prayer was that others would know what he knew.

Three features marked his life:

- (1) an awareness of the sinfulness of sin;
- (2) a deep sense of his own unworthiness; and
- (3) a profound experience of the God's love for him and others.

We are not saying that there were no other features, such as love for believers and all people. We highlight these three as they point us to an explanation of why he lived the way he did.

The young doctor of whom we speak gave up a very promising career in medicine and became a preacher.

Many used the word 'sacrifice' to describe what he did. In response he said of his calling to be a preacher, "I gave up nothing. I received everything. I count it the highest honour that God can confer on any man to call him to be a herald of the gospel."

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) was described by John Stott as "the most powerful and persuasive voice in Britain" during the middle decades of the 20th century. Jim Packer is on record as calling him, "The greatest man I have ever known."

Features

What made Lloyd-Jones a 'giant' among the preachers of the 20th century. Any analysis must include at least these two facts.

First, he was a man of God. He knew God and he enjoyed intimate fellowship with God. Visitors to his home would speak of their awareness that he lived close to God. They spoke of his gentleness, kindness and love, and of his warm and welcoming nature. They also mention how, in his presence, they were calm and at

peace. His wife, Bethan, said, "No one will ever understand my husband until they realise that he is first of all a man of prayer and then an evangelist."

Secondly, he was a man who spoke to the conscience of his hearers. This was a feature of his preaching. The Doctor, as he was known, believed "conviction of sin is the essential prelude to salvation." He was convinced "It is not sufficient merely to tell a man he is a sinner - you must prove it to him - give him examples and make him think, then there may be some hope for him."

Weakness

Why did he see conviction of sin as the essential prelude to salvation? Because each person needs to know he is weak. He wrote, "I would say of all men and women that we are all weak, very weak, the difference being that" unbelievers "do not appreciate that they are weak, whereas Christians do."

Those who know their inability and weakness look to God. They depend upon him for strength and power.

They call upon him for his Holy Spirit to work mightily within them. They do so because they want to be like Christ. They want to make him known. Their goal is to live to the glory of God.

It is not surprising then that a constant theme that emerges in the preaching of Lloyd-Jones is the need for the church and individuals to stop relying upon themselves and their efforts. The first work of the Holy Spirit, he recognised, is to convict us of sin and to humble us in the presence of God. It is "not by the schemes and devices of men" that the church grows, Lloyd-Jones insisted, "but by the intervention of God." "Our only hope", he wrote, "is that we shall be given of the Holy Spirit freely" (*see Luke 11.13*).