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FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

By Revd John Cheeseman

A Sermon based on 2 Corinthians 4:4-6

Why is it that when we share the gospel with non-Christians, in the vast majority of cases there is nil response? We have the most glorious message that any human being can pass on to another, and yet so many of our friends and acquaintances just do not want to know. They could not care less. What is the reason for this? The Bible tells us that: "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the Gospel".

There is nothing wrong with the gospel itself. We must not run away with the idea that because men and women will not respond to the gospel, the gospel somehow needs changing. There is a real danger of that kind of thinking at the present time. This is what lies behind the idea of the liberal theologians. Their argument goes like this, Twentieth Century man has come of age and can no longer believe in unscientific ideas like the virgin birth and the bodily resurrection. Therefore, we must dispense with the miraculous element in Christianity. We must make the Christian faith palatable to modern man.

I am afraid that this kind of reasoning is even affecting the evangelical wing of the Church today. Many sincere Christians have lost confidence in the gospel as the power of God for salvation, and so they tone down some aspects of the message, in case it offends people. Uncomfortable doctrines such as eternal hell or predestination have to be modified, or even rejected altogether. Or we have to have pop concerts and dance routines to soften people up before they hear the message. The plain, simple gospel is not good enough to do the job. It needs a few party tricks to ginger it up. How the Church has become tainted with the thinking of the non-Christian world!

We need to realize that we are not in the entertainment business. As John Blanchard once said: "The church is manning a life-boat not a show-boat". The Gospel itself is sufficient. The problem lies not with the Gospel, but with the blindness of the human heart. I remember some years ago driving down the Motorway towards the Blackwell Tunnel in East London on a bright, sunny day. As I entered the tunnel, I could not see a thing and for a moment I could not understand what was going on. I started to blame those responsible for illuminating the tunnel, but then I realized I still had my sunglasses on! There was nothing wrong with the lighting in the tunnel. The problem was with me and my ability to see. And so it is with the gospel. The barriers that have to be removed are not in the gospel, but in men. John Calvin put it like this, "The blindness of unbelievers in no way detracts from the clearness of the gospel. The sun is not less resplendent because the blind do not perceive its light".

This is the basic reason why men and women will not repent and believe. It is not that if we sweeten the gospel pill, folk are more likely to swallow it. No. The god of this world has blinded their minds. What is required is not a watering down of the message, but nothing less than a miracle of God's Holy Spirit. Paul makes this clear in verse 6. "It is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ". When a man becomes a Christian, the Holy Spirit opens his previously blind eyes so that he can see the truth and embrace the gospel. This is something which God alone can do. It is a sovereign, supernatural work. It has to be, because the blind cannot make themselves see. Neither can the dead bring themselves back to life.

Jesus said to Nicodemus in John chapter 3, “The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit (v.8). You and I cannot direct the wind. It acts with complete independence - so does the Holy Spirit. You and I cannot determine where and when and upon whom the Spirit is going to act, to bring a soul to Christ. He acts according to His sovereign will and purpose. What we have to do is to be faithful in making the gospel known to as many as possible, and then leave the result in His hands.

The other thing to notice from verse 6 is that the work of conversion is nothing less than a new creation. It is a miracle every bit as striking and powerful as the work of God in bringing light into the world at the beginning of time. There is a tendency these days to undervalue the wonder of Christian conversion. Indeed there are those who get so much more excited about the prospect of someone being healed from a physical disease. However, when a person becomes a Christian, it is a far greater miracle than any physical healing. It is the one miracle which the devil can never counterfeit. The devil is quite capable of performing all kinds of signs and wonders. He worked through the magicians of Egypt, in the time of Exodus, turning rods into serpents, and rivers into blood. But the one thing the devil will never and can never do, is to bring a person to saving faith in Christ - to bring a soul from spiritual darkness to spiritual light. That has to be a creative act of God the Holy Spirit.

John Cheeseman (at the time of publication) was Chairman of Church Society Council and a Director of Church Society Trust.