

Passion for People – Oswald Sanders

“Even if I were utterly selfish, and had no care for anything but my own happiness, I would choose, if I might, under God, to be a soul-winner; for never did I know perfect, overflowing, unutterable happiness of the purest and most ennobling order till I first heard of one who had sought and found the Saviour through my means. No young mother ever so rejoiced over her first-born child, no warrior was so exultant over a hard-won victory.” So spoke that matchless winner of souls, Charles H. Spurgeon. Only those who have never given themselves to the exercise of this divine art would be disposed to quarrel with him for the seeming extravagance of his statement.

And yet, despite the fact that this “perfect, overflowing, unutterable happiness” is within the reach of the humblest and least capable believer, comparatively few seem sufficiently in earnest to strive after its attainment. A passion for souls is rare among church members today. The great mass of Christian people feel not the slightest responsibility for the souls of their fellow men. It never so much as dawns on them that they are their brother's keeper. If they can manage to save their own souls, that is the end of their concern. The reasons for this apathy are not far to seek.

I. ABSENCE OF CONVICTION THAT EVERY IMPENITENT SOUL IS UTTERLY LOST

There may be a willingness to subscribe to the orthodox creed concerning future punishment, but there is a world of difference between a creedal belief and a working faith. Judge Mingins had been an infidel in his youth, and had lived with his infidel companions in Philadelphia. Some time after his conversion he was visiting one of them, who said: “George, I hear you are a Christian now. Is that so?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Mingins.

“George, do you believe in God?”

“Yes.”

“And do you believe in Hell, and that all who do not believe in God and in Jesus Christ will ultimately go to Hell?”

“I do, most certainly.”

“Well, George,” said he, “does Christianity dry up all the milk of humanity in one's body as it has in yours?”

“Why,” said Mr. Mingins, “what do you mean?”

“I mean this,” he replied, “that here you have been living under my roof for three days and three nights, knowing and believing all this, and yet you never put your hand on my shoulder, or said one word to save me.” How many of my readers are in the boat with Judge Mingins?

The case was put even more strongly by a gifted and noted infidel, who said: “Were I a religionist, did I truly, firmly, consistently believe, as millions SAY they do, that the knowledge and the practice of religion in this life influences destiny in another, religion should be to me EVERYTHING. I would cast aside earthly enjoyments as dross, earthly cares as follies, and earthly thoughts and feelings as less than vanity. Religion would be my first waking thought and my last image when sleep sank me in unconsciousness. I would labor in her cause alone. I would not labor for the meat that perisheth, nor for treasures on earth, but only for a crown of glory in heavenly regions where treasures and happiness are alike beyond the reach of time and chance. I would take thought for the morrow of eternity alone. I WOULD ESTEEM ONE SOUL GAINED FOR HEAVEN WORTH A LIFE OF SUFFERING. There should be neither worldly prudence nor calculating circumspection in my engrossing zeal. Earthly consequences should never stay my hand nor seal my lips. I would speak to the imagination, awaken the feelings, stir up the passions, arouse the fancy. Earth, its joys and its grief, should occupy no moment of my thoughts; for these are but the affairs of a portion of eternity—so small that no language can express its comparatively infinite littleness.

"I would strive to look but on eternity and on the immortal souls around me, soon to be everlastingly miserable or everlastingly happy. I would deem all who thought only of this world, merely seeking to increase temporal happiness and laboring to obtain temporal goods—I would deem all such pure madmen. I would go forth to the world and preach to it, in season and out of season; and my text should be: 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul.'"

THE MASTER SOUL-WINNER

Why have I troubled to quote this in full? Because all unwittingly, the infidel has here written the philosophy of life of that Master Soul-winner, the Lord Jesus. Now read it again and see how accurately it presents His attitude to this world and to eternity. His life was absolutely consistent with His belief in the everlasting punishment of the lost. Have we the mind of Christ in this? Is our attitude to this life and eternity that described in the infidel's statement?

Many years ago, Charles Peace, one of the greatest of criminals, was brought to justice. A burglar, forger, and double murderer, he was condemned to death. As he was being led to the scaffold, the chaplain walked by his side, offering what we call "the consolations of religion." As the chaplain spoke of Christ's power to save, the wretched man turned to him and said: "Do you believe it? Do you believe it? If I believed THAT, I would willingly crawl across England on broken glass to tell men it was true."

Thank God it is true; but if the measure of our belief in its truth were the efforts we are making for the salvation of souls, I am afraid our belief could not be described as vital. General Booth once said that he would like to send all his candidates for officership to Hell for twenty-four hours as the chief part of their training. Why? Because it is not until we have a vital conviction of the irrevocable doom of the impenitent, that our belief will crystallize into action.

II. ABSENCE OF CONCERN FOR THE LOST

An old Puritan used to speak of having a "concern," and a meaningful expression it is. Christ had a concern for the individuals and for the multitudes. His concern was so real and so deep that at times the flood of manly tears could no longer be restrained, and rolled down His compassionate face. Jesus, the manliest of men, wept. Paul, the brave, besought men, night and day with tears, to be reconciled to God. When a young missionary, who had been invalided home, was asked why he was so eager to get back to his people, he said, "Because I cannot sleep for thinking about them."

Oh, for tear-filled eyes! Oh, for sleepless eyes, because of the imminent danger and doom of the unsaved! Do the tears ever start unbidden from OUR eyes as we behold our city filled with sin and suffering and shame? Does sleep ever flee OUR eyes because of our concern for the souls around? How cold and callous and benumbed are our souls!

Oh, for a passionate passion for souls,

Oh, for a pity that yearns!

When William C. Burns, so greatly used in revival work in Murray McCheyne's parish, and later in China, was commencing his ministry, his mother met him one day in a Glasgow close. Seeing him weeping, she said: "Why those tears?" He answered, "I am weeping at the sight of the multitudes in the streets, so many of whom are passing through life unsaved."

General Booth received a message from one of his captains that the work was so hard he could make no progress. The General sent back a reply of two words: "Try tears." Success visited that corps.

Never was a day like the present for fine scholarship in the pulpit and high standard of intelligence in the pew. But culture of the heart has lagged far behind the culture of the mind. Pulpit power has decreased rather than increased. And the reason? Dr. Goodell rightly diagnoses

the case when he says: "No man can be a herald of his Lord's passion if he does not himself share it." Less scholarship, if indeed one must be sacrificed on the altar of the other, and more "concern" would soon see a turn of the tide. Many an ignorant man or woman, because of an evidently sincere concern for the souls of others, has been wonderfully fruitful in soulwinning. Entirely innocent of theology, they have manifested the love of the Master in so convincing a way that their appeal has been irresistible. Dr. Wilbur Chapman tells of such a case:

WHAT "CONCERN" ACHIEVED

"I went to hear D. L. Moody preach when I was a country minister, and he so fired my heart, that I went back to my country church and tried to preach as he preached, and we had really a great work of grace. It did not start immediately; and I was so discouraged, because things did not go as I thought they ought, that I called my church officers together and said: 'You will have to help me.' They promised to do so, and finally an old farmer rose and said: 'I have not done much work in the church, but I will help you.' One of the officers said to me afterwards: 'Do not ask him to pray, for he cannot pray in public,' and another said: 'Do not ask him to speak, for he cannot speak to the edification of the people.' Next morning we had one of those sudden snowstorms for which that part of the country is famous, and this old farmer rose and put his horse to his sleigh and started across the country four miles to a blacksmith's shop. He hitched his horse on the outside, and went into the shop all covered with snow, and found the blacksmith alone. The blacksmith said: 'Mr. Cranmer, whatever brings you out today?' The old farmer walked to the blacksmith's bench, and putting his hand upon the man's shoulders, said: 'Tom!' and the tears started to roll down his cheeks. Then with sobs choking his utterance, he said: 'Tom, when your old father died, he gave you and your brother into my guardianship, and I have let you both grow into manhood and never asked you to become a Christian.' That was all. He did not ask him then; he could not. He got into his sleigh and drove back home. And he did not go out again for months; he almost died from pneumonia.

"But that night in the meeting, the blacksmith stood up before my church officers and said: 'Friends, I have never been moved by a sermon in my life, but when my old friend stood before me this morning, with tears and sobs, having come all through the storm, I thought it was time I considered the matter.' We received him into the church, and he is a respected church officer today. PREACHING FAILS, SINGING FAILS, BUT INDIVIDUAL CONCERN DOES NOT FAIL."

III. ABSENCE OF CONCEPTION OF THE VALUE OF A SOUL

Upon our conception of the value of the object to be won will depend the strenuousness of our labors for their salvation. "Is it really worth inconveniencing ourselves and interfering with our own enjoyment to save souls?" we ask. Let us endeavor to arrive at some true estimate of the value of a soul. A man will work harder to recover diamonds than gravel. Why? Because they are of so much greater value. And so with the souls of men. Christ conceived the human soul to be of such transcendent value that He gladly exchanged the shining courts of glory for a life of poverty, suffering, shame and death, rather than that it should perish. He placed the world and all it could offer in the one scale and a human soul in the other, and declared that the scale went down on the side of the soul...

Impelled by a great passion for souls, Raymond Lull, first missionary to the Moslems, cried, "To Thee, O Lord, I offer myself, my wife, my children, and all that I possess." After many years of suffering and service, he became a martyr for his Lord. David Branierd, who died when little more than thirty, said: "I wanted to wear myself out in His service, for His glory. I cared not how or where I lived, or what hardships I went through so that I could but gain souls for Christ."

Such love has burned in the breasts of all great soul-winners. Their love for souls has been reckless and prodigal.

HOW MAY THIS "CONCERN" BE OBTAINED?

It is not a natural and inevitable product of the heart. It is not produced by a fresh resolution to be concerned about souls. It will be produced in the heart only by using the means adapted to stir up

our minds on the subject. Paul's concern for souls, as one has said, sprang from a threefold conviction. First, one great verity which all must face, the Great White Throne; second, one experience through which all men must pass, the resurrection either to life or to condemnation. Third, one destiny toward which all things are moving—the great eternity.

We must cherish the slightest impression of the Spirit; take the Bible and go over the passages that show the condition of lost sinners. Dr. Wilbur Chapman suggests: "Take your New Testament and go quietly alone and read a sentence like this: 'He that believeth not is condemned already.' Then sit and think about it for ten minutes. Put your boy over against it—your girl, your wife, your husband, yourself. Then take this: 'He that hath not the Son of God, hath not life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.' I know that a soul thus burdened generally gains its desire."

Charles G. Finney urges the seeker after this "concern" to "look as it were, through a telescope into Hell, and hear their groans; then turn the glass upward and look into Heaven and see the saints there in their white robes, and hear them sing the song of redeeming love; and ask yourself: 'Is it possible that I should prevail with God to elevate the sinner there?' Do this, and if you are not a wicked man, you will soon have as much of the spirit of prayer as your body can sustain."

Lord Crucified, give me a love like Thine,

Help me to win the dying souls of men.

Lord, keep my heart in closest touch with Thine

And give me love, pure Calvary love,

To bring the lost to Thee.

A STRIKING EXAMPLE

A most striking example of the urge to win souls triumphing over even imminent death, is that of John Harper, a Baptist minister of London, who was lost with the TITANIC. At a conference held in the city of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, a man rose and gave the following testimony: "Four years ago, when I left England on board the TITANIC, I was a careless, godless sinner. I was in this condition on the night when the terrible catastrophe took place. Very soon, with hundreds more, I found myself struggling in the cold, dark waters of the Atlantic. I caught hold of something and clung to it for dear life. The wail of awful distress from the perishing all around was ringing in my ears, when there floated near by me a man who, too, seemed to be clinging to something. He called to me: 'Is your soul saved?' I replied: 'No, it is not.' 'Then,' said he, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' We drifted apart for a few minutes, then we seemed to be driven together once more. 'Is your soul saved?' again he cried out. 'I fear it is not,' I replied. 'Then if you will but believe on the Lord Jesus Christ your soul shall be saved,' was his further message of intense appeal to me. But again we were separated by the rolling currents. I heard him call out this message to others as they sank beneath the waters into eternity. There and then, with two miles of water beneath me, in my desperation I cried unto Christ to save me. I believed upon Him and I was saved. In a few minutes I heard this man of God say: 'I'm going down, I'm going down' then: 'No, no, I'm going UP.' That man was John Harper."