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How to Better One's Condition.

BY REV. A. C. DIXON.

Text—Genesis 12:1-9.

When gold was discovered in California, thousands of people made their way thither. When the government opens to settlement lands in the West 30,000 men and women are found standing on the border, waiting to enter when the time arrives. What takes them there? Simply a desire to better their condition. There is no desire more universal. Even the thieves of New York make their money by working upon this desire. An acquaintance of mine down South received a notice from a man in New York that, if he would send him one dollar, he would tell him how to make a fortune. The dollar was sent, and the reply which came was, "Go to work, you fool!" and the advice was worth more than a dollar to him.

A careful study of this call of Abraham will teach us how we may better our condition. It will give us four rules by which to work:

1. Listen to God when he speaks to you. God spoke to Abraham, and Abraham listened. We have in the Bible a guide in all things, and the first thing that it tells us is that we are in need; we have sinned; we need forgiveness and cleansing. Now until you convince a man that he really needs something, you cannot better his condition. If one has enough money, why should he seek more? If one has all the knowledge he wishes, you cannot induce him to study. In a word, if a man is well enough off in the world, he will not seek to better his condition. So God knows that he must first convince men that they are really in need of something better than they have, before he can lead them to seek a betterment. Listen to God when he tells you that you are lost; and then you will listen when he speaks to you of the Saviour.

The very first step in moral and spiritual betterment is a willingness to hear God's Word. Then we should listen to him in his providence. He speaks to us through some great calamity. What does he mean? He speaks to us through some great blessing. What does he mean? If our hearts are full of the revealed Word, it will be easy for us to interpret the meaning of God's voice in providence, but if we are empty of the word, we will not know what he means when he speaks through his providence.

2. Go where God directs. Abraham, at the command of Jehovah, left his father's house. He started out, not knowing where he was going. He knew that he was going to a good place, for God told him to start, and when we are certain that God directs to any place, let us go. Carey, sitting on his cobbler's bench with his rough map on the wall, and his books around him, heard the voice of God telling him to go and preach the gospel to the heathen. He did not go to what country he ought to go, but he was going when the time came for him to depart, his wife refused to go with him. He must obey God's voice, and he determines to go without her.

Morrison hears the voice of God telling him to go to China, and though the conversion of China appeared to be hopeless, he went at God's bidding. Livingstone heard the same voice directing him to Africa, and he started on his tour of exploration. Elliott and Brainerd were directed by the same voice to the Indians, and each one of these servants of God, though they went to suffering, really bettered their condition, when they listened to God's voice and did what he told them.

I am glad that there is one in our church who is going as a missionary to the foreign field. I wish the number might be multiplied, much as we would miss you from our work. We would be glad if at least twenty of the very brightest and best should lay themselves upon the altar of the foreign missionary work. If God is speaking to you about it, listen to him; make up your mind to go; you may be just as important for you to stay as for you to go. I have known two or three persons who offered themselves to the Foreign Mission Board, willing to go to a heathen country in order that they might get away from home. Their surroundings at home were unpleasant. They were glad to make a change, and yet it may have been God's will that they should stay right there, and serve him amid unpleasant surroundings. It may be more important for you to remain in that office or store, where the atmosphere is sulphurous with oaths and murky with infidelity, as a witness for Christ than for you to go to the heart of China. Do what God directs, while you listen to him upon your knees. If he says, "Go," let nothing hinder you; if your duty is to stay, remain, but, whether you go or stay, do whatever God commands.

3. Take all that God will give you. He said to Abraham, "I will bless you," and Abraham was willing to be blessed of God. On the border of Canaan there was the biggest real estate transaction of which I know in history. Pointing to the mountains and valleys, stretching from the water on one side to the desert on the other, —the most fertile soil in the world at that time,—God said to Abraham, "This country I give you; it belongs to you and your descendants." Abraham believed and by faith entered upon the possession of it. He owned nothing but a burial ground in it while he lived and yet he believed it was his, because God said it was. A promise of God is as good as its fulfillment. The promissory note of

some men are as good as gold, and no man's note can be more valid than God's. To be sure, he gives us inheritance by degrees, because it might not be any better for us to have all that God has promised at once than it would have been for Abraham to have all Canaan upon his hands. He would not have known what to do with it. We are permitted to receive from God whatever he will give, and we are paupers in grace and power, many of us, just because we refuse to be enriched by God's beautiful hand. Let me emphasize, however, that we should take only what God would give, and in a way that he will approve. A young man in a large dry goods store was asked by a customer for some goods which the firm had on hand a long time. The customer said, "I have seen the articles, but before I purchased them I wish to know if they are the latest style." "Are the goods in the latest style?" The young man knew that they were not, and he hesitated a moment, thinking that if he should tell him that they were not the latest style, he would certainly not buy them; and, if he told them they were, he would be telling a lie. But conscience conquered, and he said, "They are not of the latest style, but are of the very best quality." The man purchased more than he intended, and said to a friend afterwards that the firm had gained him as a customer through the honesty of that clerk. That young man refused to receive what might have come to him in a way God would disapprove. He gained more by being true, and God never lets us, in the long run, lose anything by doing right. There are men who have riches they did not receive from God. They gathered them in ways that were dark, and better for them a thousand times, if they had no wealth than that their money should be stained with the blood of their own souls. Take prosperity, if it comes to you with God's approval, but refuse it, if the devil would bestow it.

4. Let God make out of you what he will. He said to Abraham, "I will make you a blessing; your name shall be great." Here is a true definition of greatness. That man is greatest who is the greatest blessing to others. The worldly, political and commercial idea that greatness consists in making others our servants, is as far from the Christly idea as night is from day. Jesus was great in ministering to others, and God promised to make Abraham and his people a great blessing to the world through them.

I heard the other day of the act of a great man. It was a young soldier in the Glasgow infantry. He had gone there because of a slight wound in the leg. It did not amount to much, but he thought it best to remain quiet for a while. The doctor said to him, "Would you like to be bled?" "No," he replied, "I have no desire to be bled." "But suppose that by your being bled the life of another man could be saved, what then?" "Oh," said the brave Scotchman, "that alters the case; if I can save another man's life by giving my blood, here's your man." In an adjoining room was a man who had been brought in almost dead from the loss of blood, and the doctor said the only way to save him was by the infusion of the warm blood of another into his veins. The Scotch soldier bled his arm, and the doctor transferred his own warm blood to that of the dying man. After awhile the Scotchman fainted from weakness, and when he was brought to consciousness, the first thing he said was, "Is he getting better?" Does he want any more? Here it is. The willingness to be bled for the sake of another; a desire to sacrifice oneself upon the altar of the public good; is Christlike, and God would make us truly great by leading us to be ministers of good to others. Yield to his leading; let him thus make out of you what he would have you be. And remember "he that leaveth his life shall save it." Giving is the best kind of getting.

The Foreign Mission Journal.

1. Is indispensable to any Southern Baptist who wishes to keep posted on the foreign mission work of the convention. From no other source can he learn who are the missionaries, where they are at work and what they are doing. It is full of fresh information every month. If I give money for any cause, I want to know how the cause prospers.

2. Is an indispensable aid to the pastor who wants to develop the missionary spirit in his church. Hundreds of pastors and their people to the truth of this statement, and hundreds of others, who lament the poor success they have in this line, would find their efforts far more successful if they would induce their people to take this paper and inform themselves about the work. Hundreds of pastors would be helped, too, if they would read it and tell their people something about the facts as well as the theory of missions.

3. Is a very cheap. A thirty two page monthly magazine published at these figures: Single subscribers, 50 cents; from ten to twenty five, 30 cents each; from twenty-five up, 25 cents. And each subscriber receives it in a separate wrapper, addressed to him at his home.

4. Needs more subscribers. To get these, it earnestly requests pastors, and others who appreciate its value, to exert themselves to get up clubs. So can they help the Journal and the cause of foreign missions. Some time and trouble will be required, but there will be well expended. Address: Foreign Mission Journal (or Rev. T. P. Bell), Richmond, Va.

The Millennium.

It is maintained by some that the thousand years of the millennium will succeed the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the righteous; or, in other words, that the coming of Christ and the resurrection of the righteous will precede the millennium, and that the resurrection of the wicked will be at the end of the thousand years of the personal reign of Christ upon the earth. While at the Theological Institute at East Lake, some of my brethren almost accused me of being a heretic because I questioned the correctness of this view.

Now, I would like to give a few reasons for being a heretic; if, indeed, it is heresy to question such a view. My reasons are as follows: 1. It is nowhere clearly taught in the Bible. I know that it is claimed that the record of that vision in which John saw the angel bind Satan in the bottomless pit for a thousand years, during which time the souls of the saints lived and reigned with Christ, Rev. 20:1 ff., teaches this doctrine; but I do not think it is sufficiently clear to justify the view.

It must be remembered that the book of Revelation is highly figurative. Let us not deal with this chapter as though it stood wholly alone, for it is closely connected with the chapter which precedes it. But even if we were to take this particular passage literally, it would not prove the doctrine, for it says, "I saw the souls (not the bodies) of them that were beheaded," etc., v. 4. Then in v. 12, John says: "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works," and in v. 15, he says, "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire."

This certainly implies that some who stood before him had their names written in the book of life. If this be true, then there must be two resurrections of the bodies of the saints, or one of the resurrections at least cannot be of the body. Now if there is only one resurrection of the bodies of the saints, this first resurrection cannot be a resurrection of the bodies, but, as John says, "The souls of the saints." Then there is not one word said about those who are here alive at the time. Will they be changed and then be raised with the souls of the saints, and then be raised at the end of the thousand years to judgment? Let those who are able explain these things.

I know that I am more than willing to accept the true meaning of this passage, whenever it is clearly pointed out. For the present I accept the views of Dr. J. A. Smith and the general editor of his Commentary on Revelation.

2. My second reason for not accepting the views of my friends and brethren is, that the Scriptures seem to teach a general resurrection of the bodies of the righteous, and of the wicked, at the coming of Christ to judgment. Now turn to Dan. 12:1 ff. "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time; and at that time shall people shall be delivered, every one that shall be written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." I know that some claim that this passage refers to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, or the deliverance of the Jews from Antiochus or some restoration of the church to outward prosperity and victory over their enemies; but it seems to me that it refers to a general resurrection at the last day. The Jews themselves understood that there would be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust (see Acts 24:15).

Christ also presents the same idea, John 5:28-29: "Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."

"This language," says Dr. Hovey, "must refer to a bodily rather than a spiritual resurrection; (1) because those who are to be raised are said to be in their graves, a form of statement which is not elsewhere applied to those who are spiritually dead; (2) because all that are in their graves are to be raised, while the good have spiritual life already and the bad are only raised to be judged; (3) because the resurrection is assigned to the future with no hint of its occurrence now."

3. Not only does the Bible teach a general resurrection, but it teaches that the righteous and wicked will be judged together. "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats, and he shall set the sheep on the right hand and the goats on the left. Then shall the king say unto those on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Then shall he say unto those on his left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels,"

Matt. 25:31. Here we have a separation of the righteous and the wicked which is to take place at the time of the second coming of Christ. Yes, when Christ comes into this world again, he will come with his holy angels and sit upon the throne of his glory as judge, and we shall all appear before his judgment seat, there to receive the things done in the body. Paul says, 1 Thess. 4:13: "And to you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," etc.

4. Not only is the doctrine of a general resurrection, and final judgment in which the righteous and wicked shall appear together, for judgment, but we are taught that "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens (the firmaments) shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. * * * Nevertheless we * * * look for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." Now can one suppose that the wicked will be buried in this new earth for a thousand years and then be brought up for judgment? Well, some say, but I can't. Now, with my open Bible before me containing all these passages, and agreeing with my own belief, I feel somewhat justified in my heresy, and shall continue to feel so until these passages are explained away and some reason offered for the view which I have questioned.

A. J. PRESTON.
Perryville, Ala.

Itinerancy in China.

Brethren Editors: In my former article on this subject I must have left myself open to misapprehension as Dr. Teague understands me to say that itinerating "has been tried without any palpable results." From the tenor of his remarks he seems to think that this method of work has been abandoned. My language was "I thought then and still think that running about would not be the way to convert China. One fault in the method of some missionaries has been this scattering of labor—attempts to cultivate too large a territory—not remaining long enough in one place to get the foundation principles of Christianity lodged in the mind of the people, much less giving them the opportunity to act on it." And again: "A face to face contact with the raw heathen, no matter how highly civilized and educated, will soon convince one that their conversion under a few sermons, in a few days' time, might be called an impossibility."

I did not mean by this to disparage itinerating, but "running about" and "scattering of labor," which has been extensively practiced in China. This, I am happy to say, is rapidly going out of vogue, but regular itinerating will doubtless be carried on in the future as in the past. To this Baptist missionaries have in the main adhered. The plan of doing it is to settle in an important city and cultivate as extensive a region of the surrounding country as practicable, only occasionally making long tours. How large a territory shall be thus cultivated must depend upon the strength of the missionary, facilities for traveling and the number of associates. In North China we occupy three central cities—Tungchow, Hwanghien and Pingtu. The first two are adjoining county seats, the third is separated from these by two other counties. In each of these occupied counties (or districts) there are from eight hundred to nine hundred cities, towns and villages—in which the whole population dwells—ranging from a few hundred to tens of thousands of souls.

In the first years of our occupancy many of these were visited each year with the gospel as possible, missionaries often preaching at eight to ten per day for weeks in succession, resting between each sermon while walking or riding on a donkey from one place to another. As time passed on and facilities for intercourse increased, it seemed better to visit fewer places and visit these oftener. It has always been the practice of our mission to spend the spring and autumn in this kind of labor, summer and winter work being mainly concentrated upon the occupied cities. A week or two spent at each of ten or twelve places twice every year will take up these itinerating seasons, and a week's stay is as little as ought to be given to one town. When it is remembered that the Chinese have no Sabbath, no halls for assembling, no meetings for public speaking, no habit of listening to discourses, one may get some idea of the difficulty of disseminating religious or other knowledge among them. It must be done, mainly, after the gaping curiosity to see the foreigner is over, by talking to individuals or groups, and by preaching on the streets. The great trouble is, that there have been, and are, so few of us to do this work, we seem engulfed in the great ocean of heathenism around us.

That "we have not sufficiently laid hold of the expectations authorized by some of the broad promises of our gracious Heavenly Father," I admit and bemoan. As to methods, all that we recommend ourselves have been tried and carried on persistently, and if there are other desirable ones yet untried it is because the twelve hundred Protestant missionaries who study the subject by day and by night—who search the Scriptures for guidance and lay themselves on God's altar for service, have not been able to discuss them.

We greatly need spiritual power and expected to exceed those from whose ranks we have come out; when they shall shine brighter in the churches and ministers at home, they will do the same in the missionaries abroad. God speed the day when it shall be so! In Shantung those missions which have had many workers have had large gatherings of converts; while those—ourselves among the number—who have had few have been able to gather only a sheaf here and there. It takes the spiritual force of many united to overcome the heathenism of China's millions. When will our Southern Baptist churches awake to this condition of things and send evangelizers sufficient to make an impression upon at least a portion of this great mass? When will obedience to Christ's commands, and affliction of heart for a lost world arouse them to adequate action? Until this is done, they must be satisfied with meagre results. M. F. CRAWFORD.
Tungchow, Oct. 5, 1891.

Law and the Personal Will.
Dr. Kerfoot, replying, through the *Religious Herald*, to Prof. Noah K. Davis, concerning the reasonableness of praying for rain, makes this conclusion:

Nor do we need to go very far along the path of science to see just where the falsity of such a view lies. It lies in a failure to recognize "the relation of law to personal will, and the relation of personal will to law." If there be no living, personal, powerful will in the universe—nothing but fixed laws—then would it be true that there could appear only the constancy of law, without any variability or shadow of turning. Then would it be true that rain would come always, and only, as a necessary result of established laws of nature, with which there could never be any intelligent interference. But once grant a personal will in the midst of all the laws of nature, and then what? Then the so-called fixed (?) laws of nature become only the tools, the implements, the means, by which that personal will can work out its purposes. And the extent to which that personal will works out its purposes by means of these fixed (?) laws of nature is only a question of the knowledge which it has of those laws, and the power which it has to use them. This is true even as to the personal will of a human being. Here we find ourselves in the midst of the so-called fixed and immutable laws of nature. And yet what a power has man shown to subvert nature! And by his knowledge of nature's laws, and his power over nature's laws, what power has he not shown to change the so-called natural course of things into courses consistent with one of nature's will. How is it able to use one of nature's laws to resist or overcome another of nature's laws, and by thus resisting nature's laws at one point and helping them at another, and by combining and arranging these laws at yet other points, what is it that man has not been able to effect, and bring about, in the midst of her fixed (?) and so-called "inexorable" laws of nature? Every contrivance, every invention of skill, is a testimony simply to man's knowledge of nature's laws, and his power to make these laws become his servants instead of allowing them to be his masters. Only this morning I read in my newspaper that a man, poor little puny man, is now actually engaged in an attempt to make it rain when and where he wishes. We all know that during our war whenever a great battle was fought there was almost sure to follow a heavy rain. And now it has been worked out into a theory, that by the firing of cannon in the atmospheric conditions to make it almost certain that rain will follow. And so we find men in certain sections actually praying our government to give them rain. And the government is undertaking, I believe, to answer these prayers for rain; and is hoping that it has enough of nature's laws, and has enough power over nature's laws to succeed in doing it. And nobody says it is unscientific either to make this request, or for the government to try to answer this prayer. But then, in the face of all this, we are told that God Almighty, who made nature and all of nature's laws, cannot give us a shower of rain except in one way—that is, by some *itself*. In accordance with certain laws, "fixed," as are laws of an eclipse or of a transit of Venus? Strange, strange indeed, that man may play and project with nature's laws to his heart's content—yes, and may bend them to his will in ten thousand ways, and yet that God—God the Almighty, freewill of the universe, just stand with his hands folded, utterly unable to bend nature's laws even enough to make a rain cloud in its course from east to south east or south! Is there any science in such a proposition as this? Is it not a truer and higher science, while we admit a belief in God, to believe in a *sure enough God*—a God who is able to use nature's clouds and winds, and all of nature's laws "as the well adjusted cogs and rackets and wheels of a grand machinery" over which he himself presides; and by means of which, with relatively less violent interferences than the slipping of a band, or the pressing of a lever, he is able to accomplish any purpose of his will, from the distilling of rain where he pleases, to the turning aside of a cyclone in its sweep—yes, and, if ever occasion really demands it, to come; that, but of the money comes to the variation of an eclipse, or the change of a transit of Venus? Is it science, or "science falsely so called," to believe in any other God than such a God as this?

Several Things.

Will the Pastors Help Us? The Second Flood Passed!

There are two periods in our missionary work which may be called *flowtimes*. One is in April, the other in September and October. The meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention occurs just after the first and the State Convention after the second. The flood does no particular damage, only it is sure to be followed by excessive drouth.

The second flood has just passed, and the dry drouth has set in already. At the convention the secretary received less than fifty dollars, and the State Convention after the second flood had gone up a thousand per cent! When this scribe reached home he found the drouth was exceedingly dry, for only about fourteen dollars had reached the office during his week's absence at the convention.

Brethren, let's all quit the old plan which brings the money by "fits and starts," and which is so distressing to boards and secretaries.

SOME GOOD EXAMPLES.

The churches at Selma and Evergreen by monthly collections prove what can be done by churches in the cities and larger towns. The churches at W. D. Gay, Z. D. Roby and Sydney Catts, taking monthly collections, show what can be done in the smaller towns and in the country. I could mention many others who are collecting monthly, and who of brethren who call for mission contributions quarterly, but these names are first in mind, because of their frequent remittances. Something every month is sure to come from those whose names I have mentioned, and many others who could be named if time and space would permit.

BIBLE AND COLPORTAGE.

The convention instructed the secretary of the State Mission Board to press collections for Bible and Colportage as he did for missions. We want raise to for this board \$4,000. Please remember when dividing your collections for missions to set apart some for the Bible and Colportage work too. If it is sent to me "united," it is made my duty to prorate it between State Missions, Home Missions, Foreign Missions and Bible and Colportage.

CHURCH BUILDING.

It is to be made more prominent in the future. There are twenty churches in little name in two minutes, where a little help right now would be a God-send to them.

Brother Hale's fine church in Birmingham is ruining because the brethren haven't the means to put on the roof. Brother, sister, when you read this send that church something at once. Their pastor is now visiting the churches in the interest of that building. Don't wait for him to come, but send it on without delay. The church at Marion sent him over a hundred dollars a week or two since. The condition of that house arises from no fault of theirs—they had no dream of calling on the people outside of Birmingham for help when they began to build. They will pay back to the denomination a thousand fold in a short time all that is given them. Our church at Shelby is enclosed, but the brethren can go no farther without help.

Brother O'Hara and the little church are making a noble fight against terrific odds—they need and deserve the sympathy and help of our more fortunate churches.

Probably as heroic a band as can be found in any part of the state, is Joe Lambert and the little church in Wilcox county, on the M. & B. road. But I need not mention more. We want especially to interest the Sunday schools in this movement. If the pastors and superintendents will encourage them, the schools will easily raise the two thousand dollars for this purpose.

"THIS YEAR"

Begins, not with this or last January, but with November 1st. This is the beginning of the missionary year. Brethren, please read this and start with the year, and don't forget that this is the CENTENNIAL YEAR.

Our people will hear of Wm. Carey, Adoniram Judson, Ann Hasseltine Judson and a host of others for the next year as they have never heard before. Every phase of the mission question, all the active agents, from him who came to seek and to save a lost world, down to the most humble missionary who has sailed for the heathen land; the Holy Spirit and the Holy Book; all our missionary machinery, boards, secretaries, books and mission papers—all, will be brought before the Baptists of the world the coming year. "What will reveal that, but of the money comes to the treasury? if the money comes from every one of our missionary meetings, somebody must take a collection after every missionary meeting. Let these words burn themselves into the mind of every one who takes part in these meetings. Otherwise, we will have a year of Baptist bluster and brag, and not much else. True, the truth has been preached and much good seed has been sown and it will bear for good in the generations to come; but, but of the money comes to the treasury? if the money comes from every one of our missionary meetings, somebody must take a collection after every missionary meeting. Let these words burn themselves into the mind of every one who takes part in these meetings. Otherwise, we will have a year of Baptist bluster and brag, and not much else. True, the truth has been preached and much good seed has been sown and it will bear for good in the generations to come; but, but of the money comes to the treasury? if the money comes from every one of our missionary meetings, somebody must take a collection after every missionary meeting. Let these words burn themselves into the mind of every one who takes part in these meetings. Otherwise, we will have a year of Baptist bluster and brag, and not much else. 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