

THE MAIN THEMES
OF
ALEXANDER WHYTE

by

The Revd Peter Davidson

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In the late 1940s and the early 1950s the sermons and lectures of Dr Alexander Whyte received much attention on both sides of the Atlantic. The Editor has asked me to reprint an article I wrote for "THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY" in 1955. No copyright was involved and although the magazine is no longer printed, and I have been unable to track down former Editors, I acknowledge my debt to men like F.F. Bruce who edited the magazine in 1955, and who died recently.

The subject that predominates throughout the whole of Whyte's preaching is - sin. He desired to be known as a "specialist in the study of sin", which he ever reminds his hearers is nothing else but the "plague of their own hearts". He scourges his congregation regarding their sins, but he is no less severe in self-condemnation. Running parallel to all his preaching upon sin is the plea for introspection and self-examination. He makes sin startle us; he shakes our self-complacency. We are no longer even sons of man, but worms grovelling in the filth of hell. Can we read such sentences as the following without flying to the mercy-seat? Talking of the infamous Judge Jeffreys he exclaims:

"If you lay your ear close enough to your own heart, you will sometimes hear something of that same hiss with which that human serpent sentenced to torture and death ... men and women. O yes, the very same hell broth

that ran for blood in Judge Jeffrey's heart is in all our hearts also: And those who have the least of its poison left in their hearts, will be the foremost to confess its presence, and to hate, and to condemn, and to bewail themselves on account of its terrible dregs."¹

Again:

"For our sin is the mother of all our troubles: Get² rid of the mother and you will soon be rid of her offspring."

Whyte reminds us that the individual is again crucifying Christ with his sins:

"Oh that mine head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep³ day and night for the Son of God whom I have slain by my sin."

Dr Whyte is ever concrete in his thought regarding the nature and the works of sin. He is never the abstract theologian, but to use his own pet term, he is experimental.

"Nay not only has self-love the largest place of any of the other passions of our hearts, but it is out of self-love that all our other passions spring. It is out of this parent passion that all the poisonous brood of our other evil passions are born. The whole fall and ruin and misery of our present human nature lies in this, that in every human being self-love has taken in addition to its own place, the place of the love of God and of the love of man also ..."⁴

Dr Whyte, unlike many evangelical preachers, gave a great emphasis to ethical subjects. He took the so-called ordinary failings of mankind and fitted them into his "sin-theology". In his lecture on "Evangelist", he commends the advice of Robert Hall to young preacher:

¹ Bunyan Characters (1st Series), p.195
² Lord, Teach Us to Pray, p.31
³ Ibid., p.274
⁴ Bunyan Characters (1st Series), p.93

"Be not afraid of devoting whole sermons to particular parts of moral conduct and religious duty. It is impossible to give right views of them unless you dissect characters and describe particular virtues and vices. The works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit must be distinctly pointed out. To preach against sin in general without descending to particulars may lead many to complain of the evil of their hearts while at the same time they are awfully inattentive to the evils of their conduct."

Alexander Whyte's hearers were never left in any doubt !

Obstinacy became a dart of the Evil One. Envy and wrong ambition are satanic.

"Ambition, emulation and envy are the leading members of a whole prolific family of satanic passions of hatred and ill-will, are in our Lord's words the very lusts of the Devil himself; and detraction, how some men's inkhorns are filled with detraction for ink, and how it drops from their tongues like poison ! At their every word a reputation dies ... our sanctification and salvation lie in our mastery over all these and many other passions that have not even been named ..."²

Impatience is "a great sin", and anger must drive us to penitence. In his preaching as in his early studies, Alexander Whyte based his sermons and lectures on "first principles". Man's actions are never so important in the sight of God as motives and intentions. It was motive that drove our first parents out of Eden.

"The one thing needful, then, in all that we think and say and do is a good motive. The new birth that we must all every day undergo, the one all-embracing change of heart that God demands of us in his Son every day is a complete change of end and intention, a completely new motive. The fall of man took place when God ceased to be man's motive and when each man became his own motive and his own end ... and the supreme need of all men is just the restoration to their hearts, of God as their true motive and their chief end."³

¹ Bunyan Characters (1st Series), p.20

² Ibid., p.96

³ With Mercy and with Judgement, p.50

Whyte kept declaring that the Christian's actions must ever be inspired by singleness of purpose:

"It is at bottom our doubleness of heart ... that so divides us up into bitter factions ... and when all our public men are like Robert Gordon, in the singleness of their aims and their motives ... the Absolute monarchy of the Kingdom of Heaven will have come."¹

Again:

"Now there are honest and there are dishonest hearts in every congregation. The honest heart is the heart of the hearer who has come up here tonight with a right intention. His motive in being here is an honest motive ... his eye is single and this whole house has been full of light to him tonight ..."²

Robertson Nicoll, writing to Denney in 1894, makes this comment on Whyte's preaching: "Whyte always insists on your calling yourself a dog or a worm. But 'ye are a royal generation.'"³ This criticism was shared by many of Whyte's admirers. They maintained that he was too much of an introvert, and placed too great an emphasis on the sinfulness of the heart. In the same letter to Denney, Nicoll adds: "Whyte's lectures seem to me to be all based on justification by works ..., thus there is never a real peace ... " Are the criticisms of Nicoll just ?

Well, we have certainly seen that Dr Whyte was a "specialist in the study of sin". He dealt with sin, and with particular "sins" in a concrete manner. He shattered the pride and self-complacency of his congregation. The note of introspection is seldom absent. Is such an approach conducive to a real vital holiness ? Our answer rests on a more important issue, "Was Dr Whyte's theology truly Biblical ?"

Whyte's biographer makes it clear that he was not a theologian, in the sense in which we would apply the term to men like Barth and Brunner,

¹ Samuel Rutherford and some of his Correspondents, pp 110-111.
² Our Lord's Characters, p.17
³ T.H. Darlow, William Robertson Nicoll, p.340

though he was not unaware of current theological views and kept his mind open to the pronouncements of the scholars. There is a sense, however, in which every man is a theologian, even though he be unaware of the meaning of the word. Dr Whyte was an "experimental" theologian; his theology was based on the horrible reality of sin. Notwithstanding the nature of sin, God himself has taken this evil thing and used it for the sinner's sanctification.

"Our Master's Cross, the corruption of our own hearts, will chase us closer up to God, than all our other crosses taken together ... yes, anything is good that chases us up to God, crosses and corruption, sin and death and hell."¹

Again:

"Once let a man be awakened of God to his own great sinfulness, and that not to its fruits in outward sorrow, but to its malignant roots that are twisted round and round through and through his heart, and that man has henceforth such a winter within him as shall secure to him a lifelong growth in the most inward grace ..."²

In his lecture on "Judge Hate-Good," Whyte breaks out:

"To know your own heart as you evidently know it, and to hate it as you say you hate it, and to hunger after a clean heart as with every breath you hunger ... all that if you would only believe it sets you or will set you high up among the people of God."³

"God chastises sin by means of sin. He employs the remaining sinfulness of the sanctified as his last and best instrument for reaching down into the depths of the heart in order to its complete discovery, complete correction and complete purification ..."⁴

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- 1 Samuel Rutherford and some of his Correspondence, p.56
 - 2 Ibid., pp.48-49
 - 3 Bunyan Characters (1st Series), p.200
 - 4 The Life of Alexander Whyte, p.421;
Lord, Teach Us to Pray, p.107

Whyte maintained that the work of grace is dependent on the sense of sin, and this sense of sin is created by the knowledge of the Law:

"You will pay no attention to him (the minister) till after the Law enters, and just to the depths, to the poignancy with which the Law of God enters your sinful heart, just in that measure will you possess in your broken heart a great or a small forgiveness."

This forgiveness is related to Jesus Christ. It is dependent upon our faith in His Cross, and our sanctification is dependent upon our faith in a Christ that is risen. It is not justification by works, but justification in and through the atoning death of Christ.

"And as if all that were not wonderful enough, not only was the Son of God made man but surely most amazing of all, He was made sin till he died for sin the accursed death of the Cross, a death both wonderful and fearful beyond all words of God or man ... yet all that is but preliminary and preparatory to the wonderfulness of His name as your Redeemer and mine. For all His Godhead and all His Manhood and all his obedience and all His sin-atoning satisfaction, with all His High Priesthood in Heaven - all that was absolutely necessary before He could say to us this Communion morning 'Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.'"²

Again:

"That awful handwriting so long as it lasted stood absolutely blocking up our way to peace with God, and with Man, and with ourselves. It stood also, absolutely blocking our way to the possession and enjoyment of all that we now possess and enjoy in the life to come. But now Jesus Christ our surety, our substitute, our sin-atoning sacrifice, and our great High Priest has taken every syllable of that evil³ handwriting against us and has nailed it to His Cross ..."

¹ Our Lord's Characters, p.111

² The Spiritual Life, p.48

³ Ibid., p.208

Through the Cross the sinner is ransomed from his guilt.

To Dr Whyte, however, this event was only the initial step. Conversion was the beginning and not the end of salvation. To Alexander Whyte, the seventh chapter of Romans was no pre-conversion of experience only; it was repeated again and again in the soul of the believers.

"We speak in our shallow way about the Apostle Paul being for ever out of the seventh chapter of Romans and for ever in the eighth. But Paul never spoke in that superficial manner about himself. And he could not, for both chapters were fulfilling themselves within their profound author, sometimes at one and the same moment. Sometimes the old man was uppermost in Paul and sometimes the new man: sometimes the flesh and sometimes the spirit: sometimes the law and sin and death had Paul under their feet. But all the time the three were within Paul ... and so it is with ourselves."

Again:

"The heart of a great sinner under a great sanctification is the field of all fields. All other fields are but parables to him of his own field ... Let him plough and harrow, and plough and harrow again; let him change his seed; let him rotate his crops. With all he can do there is the accursed thing always coming up choking the wheat ... but here also ... our Lord advises patience."

Dr Whyte was no Perfectionist. There was a great gulf fixed between justification through Christ and sanctification in Christ. But here again it would be inaccurate to say that Dr Whyte preached a gospel of "Sanctification through works", though there is certainly more ground for this criticism than for the comment of Robertson Nicoll. Whyte's ethical preaching gives this impression, but on a closer examination we discover that it was ever the Indwelling Christ, the Risen Christ who worked in the hearts of the believers.

¹ Our Lord's Characters, p.104

² Ibid., pp.28-29

"And then true saving faith being once rooted in any man's heart, it will under the Divine Husbandman's gracious care grow up to 'full assurance of faith' as we see it growing up to full assurance in such great examples of the faith as Abraham in the Old Testament and Paul himself in the New Testament."

Again, in his Shorter Catechism he reminds us:

"Justification is an act of God's free grace : Adoption is an act of God's free grace : Sanctification is the work of God's free grace" - and grace is ever "all He does for us in Christ".

From Whyte's sermons and his writings, it is clear that neither in justification nor in sanctification does he claim that "works" are the foundation of salvation. Sanctification is ever

"the work of God's free grace whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness."

This "enabling" work, however, is a process that ends with death and not before:

"The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory."

It means "perseverance therein to the end".

The great gulf that Whyte fixes between justification and sanctification is a salutary reminder to many modern disciples that conversion is but the initial step in salvation. This initial step is, of course, of great importance, for it is the divine "moment" in which Christ comes and confronts the soul, offering pardon and presenting a call to absolute discipleship. Guilt vanishes, but sin has still to be vanquished. Certainly the power can only come to those who are still within the household of faith, but we remain sinners. Perhaps "evangelical" Christianity has laid too little emphasis on the process of sanctification, and Rome too great an emphasis on "works". Whyte's position would be attacked by the Perfectionist school, and no doubt with Biblical "proofs", but surely the man or the woman who accepts

Christ as the standard of holiness will agree with the Reformer: "simul iustus et peccator."

At this point let us gather together Dr Whyte's main teaching about the soul's relationship with God. The Law reveals sin, and consequently the sense of guilt shadows the personality. The sinner is justified through the work of Christ that satisfied the Divine Justice. It is a Divine Justice, however, that is shot through with Divine Love. The work of grace within the sinner's heart brings forth fruits "meet for repentance" until that day when in the immediate presence of God the complete sanctification of the sinner is declared by God. Is such teaching Biblical ?

Surely we find in Dr Whyte's teaching strong Pauline "meat". To Paul the law was holy, but with this claim the Apostle makes the startling allegation;

"The commandment which was ordained to life I found to be unto death, for sin slew me."¹

Again:

"Had it not been the Law I had never known what sin meant."²

In Paul's inspired thought the Law led to evil. It was the "stimulus of the negative" -

"For I had not known lust except the Law had said, Thou shalt not covet"³

The Law brought into the soul a spiritual tension, that was only resolved through the coming of Jesus and His work on the Cross.

"But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."⁴

1 Romans 8: 10†

2 Romans 7: 7

3 Ibid.

4 Galatians 4: 4

Denney was surely minimizing the significance of the resurrection for Paul when he wrote:

"The doctrine of the death of Christ and its significance was not Paul's theology; it was his gospel. It was all he had to preach."

Nevertheless there can be no living Saviour without the Cross: Calvary is fundamental,

"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by His life."²

The reconciliation has been accomplished by Christ. It now remains for man to claim this reconciliation by an act of faith. Just as the "sin-offering" was made under the Mosaic system to procure the purification of the sinner, so Christ "became sin" for us that we might be freed from the guilt of sin and be fit for communion with a holy God. But it is ever God Himself who is in Christ:

"Christ's death could never have been a propitiation for sin except by the prior determination of God's Love."³

This, however, does not exhaust the wealth of Paul's thought in regard to God and the human situation realized as a result of the Law. Man needed to be saved from the power of sin.

"Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"⁴

The death of Christ had ethical implications for the Apostle. It was the gospel of the "new creature". Men were dead in trespasses and sins, but Christ's death calls them to die unto self, and His resurrection bids them

¹ J. Denney, "The Death of Christ", 1950, p.66

² Romans 5: 10

³ Romans 6: 4

⁴ Romans 7: 24

"walk in newness of life"¹

that men

"might not live² unto themselves
but unto Him who died for them and rose again."

The "end" of salvation,
however, is not to be achieved overnight:

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended ...
I press towards the mark ..."³

While we cannot say that Alexander Whyte was a "technical" theologian, he was a master in the exposition of God's Word; he "appreciated" Paul with true insight, particularly in matters concerning the relationship between justification and sanctification. The great gulf between the two could only be bridged by the indwelling Spirit of the living Christ, but the indwelling Spirit was only free to operate in the soul of the saint who was striving wholeheartedly to overcome the Evil One. In his sermon, "The Individual and His Salvation," Whyte makes Paul exclaim:

"Never stop working at your salvation, never fall asleep at it ...
work on your own soul while a spot, or a speck, a taint or a
tarnish of sin is left in your soul. The perseverance of the
saints is made up of ever new beginnings."⁴

And again:

"Compare this out of the Serious Call, 'Unless our passions are
bent on our salvation we shall scarcely be saved.'⁵"

Man must co-operate with God in the work of salvation.

No Alexander Whyte preached Christ crucified and risen as the foundation of a complete salvation. "Works" without faith in Christ availed nothing.

¹ Romans 6: 4

² II Corinthians 5: 15

³ Philippians 3: 13f

⁴ "With Mercy and with Judgement", p.67

⁵ Ibid., p.66

Dr Whyte would have been at one with P.T. Forsyth in his statement:

"In the same way after the Reformation period, they [the theologians] dwelt upon justification until they lost sight of sanctification altogether.

Then the great pietistic movement had to arise in order to redress the balance ... Justification, sanctification, reconciliation and atonement are all equally inseparable from the one central and compendious work of Christ ..."

While we maintain that Robertson Nicoll's criticism of Alexander Whyte is without real foundation it must be conceded that Free St George's great preacher dwelt far too long in the clouds of sin and too little in the light of the soul's victory over sin. Very seldom, if ever, does he preach with apostolic abandon on the joy of life in Christ. We miss the New Testament exultation over the lost that has been found; we yearn to hear the Pauline music of the "pageant of triumph". The words of the late Principal W.M. Macgregor come to mind after reading Whyte's sermons and lectures:

"There are many Christian people who have only advanced by one stage, and have attained to a noble discontent. In their hearts they are sore and disappointed with themselves because the one apparent result of their religion is this awareness that their soul cleaves to the dust ... but Jesus intends for us some better thing, that we should be sharers not in His conflict only, but in His peace."

Whyte, himself, had passed "the first stage", though he would not have admitted that fact. What a pity he did not take up the great themes of peace, joy and comfort ! Of course if he had done so he would have ceased to be Alexander Whyte. Paul talks of "my gospel", and there is a sense in which the gospel is each man's own. The same gospel is preached by every preacher, but passing through the furnace of personal experience, it emerges shaped in different forms.

¹ P.T. Forsyth, "The Work of Christ", pp 58-59

² W.M. Macgregor, "Christ and the Church", p.72

Testimony is the child of experience, and Alexander Whyte's matter was produced from the loneliness, the struggles and the domestic environment of his early years. G.H. Morrison provided the Christian themes we miss so much in Whyte, and those themes in turn were the lessons Morrison learned from a life shadowed by great sorrow and suffering.

Whyte in his own personal life was a man of prayer and his teaching upon prayer is as searching as his preaching upon sin. Prayer was an art that could be developed by each child of God.

Redeemed man was not only a worm or a dog. He was the recipient of a magnificent God-given office:

"Our office is the royal priesthood. And we do not nearly enough magnify and exalt our royal priesthood. To be 'kings and priests unto God' ... what a magnificent office is that !"¹

Prayer is the key that opens the Treasure House of Grace.

"Now there is this magnificence about the world of prayer that in it we work out not our own bare and naked and 'scarce' salvation only, but our ever-lasting inheritance, incorruptible and undefileable with all its unsearchable riches. Heaven and earth, time and eternity, creation and providence, grace and glory are all laid up in Christ : And then Christ² and all His unsearchable riches are laid open to prayer."

Through prayer the work of sanctification goes on, not only because we pour out our hearts upon God but He pours out His heart upon us.

"And then over and above all that, there is this to crown it all. Not only do God's saints pour out their hearts upon His heart : He pours out His heart upon their hearts. His Son has come to us

¹ "Lord, Teach Us to Pray", p.3

² Ibid., p.9

straight out of His Father's heart. His eternal Son is ever in, and He is ever coming forth from, the bosom of the Father. And then the Holy Ghost comes into our hearts and brings God's heart with Him ... That, O my brethren, that is God's very heart already poured out this day upon your heart ! That softening of heart under the word, that strong sweet tender holy heavenly spirit that has taken possession of your heart in this house. What is that ? What can it be but God's very heart beginning to drop its overflowing strength and sweetness into your open and uplifted heart ... and pour out your prayer for still more of this Holy Spirit ..."¹

Prayer in the life of the justified is the divine artillery that removes the barriers between man and man. Quoting from an old diary, Dr Whyte makes the following extract his own:

"For some time past I have had to live in the same house and even sit at the same table with one I cannot bear with. I went on sinning against him in my heart till the Fast Day ... On the Fast Night I went specially to secret prayer and poured out again and again and again my whole evil heart before God. Next morning I felt it easy to be civil and even benevolent to my neighbour. And I felt at the Lord's Table today as if I would yet live to love that man. I feel sure I will."²

The benefits of prayer, however, are only for the patient.

"There are men among us who do not neglect prayer, who yet sadly neglect to watch and wait for God's promised answers to their prayers ... I am convinced we lose many answers to our prayers ... not so much because we do not pray, as because we do not go up to our tower to watch for, and to welcome God's answers to our prayers."³

¹ "Lord, Teach Us to Pray", p.36

² Ibid., pp.34-35

³ Ibid., p.109

Again:

"If you are fainting in prayer for sanctification I recommend and prescribe to you Samuel Hahnemann's dictum similia similibus curantur. Only not in small doses. The opposite of that. Small doses in prayer will be your death. The very thing that has caused your whole head to be sick, and your whole heart to faint - hitherto unanswered prayer, answered or unanswered, pray on. The answer is not your business. It is importunate and unfainting prayer that is your only business. And, always more and more importunate and unfainting prayer ..."¹

Our sanctification grows in proportion to our prayers, and to the prayers others have offered for us. Intercessory prayer is God's finest means for the sanctification of the believer.

"And entertain and practise intercessory prayer and you will by degrees and in process of time sanctify yourself to an inwardness and to a spirituality, and to a complexity and to a simplicity that hitherto you have had no experience of, no conception of and indeed no ambition after."²

Again:

"'Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.' That is something of the way Christ dwells in his heart who is strengthened by faith. That is the way He dwelt in John and Paul and in our own Samuel Rutherford. And why not in you and me. Simply because no one has prayed for us. And we have not prayed for ourselves, that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith. No prayer - no faith - no Christ in the heart. Little prayer - increasing faith - increasing Christ in the heart. Much prayer - much faith - much Christ in the heart. Praying always - faith always - Christ always. 'Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my Name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.'"³

¹ "Our Lord's Characters", p.94

² "Lord Teach Us to Pray", p.119

³ Ibid., p.152

Prayer, however, to Dr Whyte was not only a question of petition, intercession and thanksgiving and praise. Prayer is the whole movement of the soul to God in the work of sanctification.

"Now it is necessary to know and ever to keep in mind that prayer is the all-comprehending name that is given to every step in our return to God. True prayer, the richest and the ripest prayer, the most acceptable and the most prevailing prayer embraces many elements; it is made up of many operations of the mind and many motions of the heart. To begin to come to ourselves - however far off we may then discover ourselves to be - to begin to think about ourselves is already to begin to pray. To begin to feel fear or shame or remorse or a desire after better things is to begin to pray ... To see what we are and to desire to turn from what we are ... that is also to pray. In short every such thought about ourselves and about God and about sin and its wages, and about salvation, its price and its preciousness, every foreboding thought about death and judgement and heaven and hell; every reflection about the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ; and every wish for our hearts that we were more like Jesus Christ; all our reading ... meditation ... reflection ... contemplation ... prostration ... and adoration; all faith, all hope, and all love ... it all comes with the most perfect truth and propriety under the all-embracing name of "Prayer" ... How noble then is Prayer ... Who would not be a man of prayer?"

He who would be a man of prayer, however, must learn to sacrifice. Prayer demands the sacrifice of time, thought and strength and wrestling of spirit. In his sermon on "The Costliness of Prayer", Dr Whyte opens with a reference to Seneca who declared

"that nothing is so costly to us as that
in which we purchase by prayer",

and then Dr Whyte goes on to add that
such souls as Dante and Teresa confirmed the utterance of the Stoic. Whyte

¹ "Lord Teach Us to Pray", pp.185-186

emphasizes in this sermon that prayer is a sphere of Christian labour. In this sphere as well as in the practice of Christian morals, the justified man must work out his salvation; he must, as it were, record an engagement of prayer upon his diary; it must be there, and when it is, a challenge is presented. Is God to receive our time ?

"But in revenge, when reading and meditation and prayer do once begin to come in on a man, they make great inroads both upon his hours of work, and his hours of recreation, and even upon his hours of sleep ... we come to discover that time, pure time, is as indispensable and as important an element in all true prayer as is repentance, or faith, or reformation itself. Indeed, without a liberal allowance of time, no man has ever attained to a real life of prayer at all ... Now that cannot, surely, be said to be bought cheaply which despoils us of so much of the most precious thing we possess ..."

Real prayer demands a concentration of the whole individual upon what Butler described as the "Being and the Nature of God". Whyte reminds us that prayer ever makes this tremendous demand and illustrates his claim from the Psalmists, the words of our Lord and His Apostles, and our own George Gillespie. The saint must go into the presence of God concentrating upon God's Nature and Being.

"God is a Spirit, Infinite, Eternal and Unchangeable in His Being, Wisdom, Power, Holiness, Justice, Goodness and Truth - Try your grasp of thought on such matters as these ... No wonder that we often fall asleep through sheer exhaustion of body and mind, when we begin to give something like adequate time and thought to meditation, adoration, prayer and praise."²

The greatest sacrifice is in the realm of the Spirit. Effectual prayer is achieved through the yielding of the human will, desires and sins.

"To say, 'Thy will be done,' when we enter our Gethsemane - that throws

¹ "Lord Teach Us to Pray", pp.194-195

² Ibid., p.198

us on our faces on the earth : that brings the blood to our brows. And yet at no less cost than that was God's own Son 'heard in that he feared.' ... What a heart-racking price has to be paid for in that prayer !"¹

Again true prayer

"... will cost you all your soft, and easy and slothful and self-indulgent habits."²

In prayer, as in the endeavour after moral perfection, the Christian must be "one of God's athletes". Indeed, the quality of the Christian's moral character is in direct proportion to the quality of his prayer life, for true prayer begets humility, and true humility "is the very foundation-stone of the whole edifice of the Christian character."

"But if you would know it, my brethren, a lifetime of unceasing and ever-deepening prayer is by far the best security against pride and by far the best guarantee of a genuine evangelical humility. I feel sure of this, that every truly spiritually-minded man among you experiences his greatest humiliation when he is alone with God in secret prayer, the things he has still to confess; the things, the mere mention of which lays him down in the dust of death - O you therefore, who have been chosen and called to prosecute a life of spiritual humility, frequent continually your secret place and time of prayer !"³

Dr Whyte's mighty sermons on Prayer reveal that he was a man of prayer. Such sermons as found in his book, "Lord Teach Us to Pray" were conceived and delivered in prayer.

"'Alexander Whyte's preaching would be no use today,' said a minister of the Kirk the other day. We beg to differ. Such a statement reveals little or no knowledge of this great preacher.

¹ "Lord Teach Us to Pray", p.199

² Ibid., p.201

³ "The Spiritual Life", p.218

He was certainly the child of his age in the question of approach and communication, but are we not all the children of the present hour ? When we look deeper, we see a man who, like his own 'Bible Characters', belongs to every age. What type of preaching does our Church need today ? Surely we still need men of broad-minded intellect, broad yet deep, founding a ministry upon the "first principles" of justification and sanctification, applying the Christian ethic to social problems and holding an ecumenical attitude without sacrificing their own particular proved tradition."¹

Yes, men like Dr Alexander Whyte, expressing these New Testament principles in the language of today, and through any other channels that the Holy Spirit points out, are the need of the hour.

How far short we all come !

Far short, because it cannot be said of us as it was said of him:

"In days of doubt and misgiving, when I am not far from doubt and despair I find in the tokens of his faith and love the key of the prison."

¹ Words of the late Revd H. Ross, quoted in G.F. Barbour, "Life of Alexander Whyte", p.477

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