Conviction, Cleansing, Consecration

"Then said I Woe; is me! For I am undone;
Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell
In the midst of a people of unclean lips:
For mine eyes have seen the King,
The LORD of Hosts. Isaiah 6:5-8

A Manuscript Sermon preached at Clarendon St. Church, Boston by Rev. A. J. Gordon

I. Our conviction. "Then said I woe is me for I am undone."

What contrasts here come out; "Woe is me" and "mine eyes have seen the king."
We can never see ourselves as we are till we see Christ as he is. It takes the alabaster
whiteness of the Saviour to reveal the blackness of the sinner. Here is the secret of self-
righteousness; the eye fixed on self absorbs the color of self more and more, till it
become color-blind to the white righteousness of Christ and so the true standard of
judgment is lost. But he who once sees Jesus as the chief among ten thousand will
recognize himself as the chief of sinners. So it was with Isaiah, and yet he was one of the
holiest of men. The idea that the guiltiest men are likely to appear to themselves to be the
guiltiest men is entirely erroneous. They say that you may talk with a hundred convicts
in state prison and you will find on the average ninety percent of them strongly asserting
their innocence and the utter injustice of their imprisonment. "By the law is the
knowledge of sin", says scripture. But it is the holiness of the law rather than the
penalties of the law that brings conviction of sin. And it is because Christ is the
incarnation of that holiness that he so powerfully reveals the sinner's guilt to him. The
prisoner brooding over his confinement and sufferings, sees self altogether, and self is not
a good background for seeing sin: and guilt never becomes really ashamed of itself by
looking upon itself. It takes white to convict black. A gentleman not long since bought a
costly residence in the upper part of New York. When he had moved into it he discovered
to his horror, that the house next to his was an elegant den of infamy, to which the most
aristocratic sinners resorted for debauchery under cover of the night. He appealed to the
law for redress: but in vain. Our lawyers rarely touch sin when that sin has millions
behind it. Then he betook himself to another method. He erected a powerful electric
light in front of his residence, so powerful that the whole neighborhood became bright as
a summer noon-day. That accomplished the result. The house of infamy was deserted by
its patrons. They could not bear Christ said: "For ever one that doeth evil hateth the light
neither cometh near the light lest his deeds be reproved." O how quickly self-flattering
lips become unclean lips when the glory of the Lord is seen. How respectable sin shrinks
abashed and runs into its hiding-place when the incandescent brightness of Immanuel’s
face is uncovered!

"Woe is me for I am undone for I am a man of unclean lips for mine eyes have
seen the king." - "I am undone - - this is what we all must recognize before the Lord can
bless us. Ask me to spell redemption and I will do it for four words - "Undone." O how
quickly salvation is accomplished when the undone sinner comes to the well done work of
Christ and rests upon it and trusts in it. Patch your good doing upon Christ and there is
never harmony. The two do not fit together. It is worse than "putting new cloth into a
new garment." It is putting old cloth into a new garment. The old fallen nature joined
upon Christ’s new and spotless nature. No, cast your good deeds and your bad deeds into
one pile and run from both to the finished work of Christ crying "The Lord my
righteousness."

Here is the law of God which is holy just and good. Its stern and solemn
command is "This do and thou shall live." I ask you what answer you can file to this
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Injunction. Beneath the requirement "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart" can you write "Lord it is done as though hast commanded?" If you cannot, you must write "Undone." For whosoever keepeth the whole law and yet offendeth in one point he is guilty of all. Therefore if you cannot write "Done" under a single one of the commandments, the whole law writes "Undone" against you. "All have sinned and come short" and therefore all are condemned. As it is written: -"For by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified.

It has been truly said that the law of God is like a mirror; it can show us our faces but it cannot wash them, and I may add that Christ is like the clear crystal water which cannot only reflect our faces but can also wash them. This is why I would bring you to Christ this morning my hearers. I want you to see Christ that you may see yourselves in contrast; your sinfulness in the light of his holiness, your impurity in the light of his impurity, your selfishness in the light of his self-denial, your hardness of heart in the light of his tenderness of heart, and when you have see yourselves that you may be washed and made white in his blood. One thing have I desired, therefore above all others, that I might see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Thus only discover the darkness of my own sin and the evil of my own nature. Shine upon me then, O Christ, that thou mayest shame my sins: increase within me that this self may decrease within me.

2. Our cleansing. "Then flew one of the seraphim", Mark the immediateness of mercy. God does not keep the penitent waiting. The Bible tells us that the Lord is slow to anger but it nowhere affirms that he is slow to forgive. Instead of making us wait for his grace it declares that he waiteth to be gracious. Indeed, here is the point where the Lord even gets ahead of time. For he says: -And it shall come to pass that before they call I will answer and when they are yet speaking I will hear. You know that telegraph messages are often received at an earlier hour that when they are sent, simply because electricity runs with motion of the earth and gets ahead of time. Well, it is so with mercy. It has outrunned our penitence and reached the heart before our cries have reached the throne. "O Lord have mercy upon me", cries the sinner. Then he opens his Bible and reads: -Having forgiven you all trespasses blotting the handwriting of ordinances that was against us which was contrary to us, he took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. When did he nail our sins to the cross? When he died. When did he forgive us all trespasses? When on Golgotha and Calvary. Before we had asked, Father forgive them he forgave: before we had shed any tears for our sins, he shed his blood for them. While we were yet a great way off, God in Christ came out to meet us. Oh the wonderful immediateness of mercy. God is so gracious that he makes swift haste to meet the first overture of penitence: yea out runs our prayers and pleading and send us his grace to incite our tears and his pardon to draw out our penitence. And I cried Woe is me for I am undone. Then flew one of the seraphim. It is just as it was with Daniel. He was making earnest supplication for his people, and while was speaking Gabriel was made to fly swiftly and bring the answer.
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And how was the prophet’s cleansing affected? Then flew one of the seraphim
unto me having a live coal in his hand which he had taken with the tongs from off the
altar, and he laid it upon my mouth and said: Lo this hath touched thy lips and thine
iniquity is taken away and thy sin is purged. Here was consecration as well as cleansing.
The lips that had been unclean were now to be holy unto the Lord to declare his love and
to proclaim aloud his glory.

You see how like this is to what came to the church at Pentecost. And there
appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire and it sat upon each of them. Fire is the
symbol of cleansing. It meets the heart and purges its dross. There is not a Christian that
does not need the baptism of fire to fit him for his work. Hence to the whole church the
promise is He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Christ alone did not
need this. He was baptized with the Holy Ghost: but when the Spirit came upon his
disciples in the symbol of fire it came to him in the symbol of a dove. The fire is the
emblem of cleansing the dove of purity. Because Christ was pure, the Spirit came on him
like a dove; because his disciples need to be made pure the Spirit came upon them like as a
fire. Observe the part of the body that is marked for sanctification. When the leper was
cleansed under the law the priest took blood and sprinkled it on his right ear, on his right
hand, and on his right foot: and then the oil was put upon the blood. This was to indicate
that the whole man was cleansed and sanctified. Here it was the lips that were touched.
Isaiah was to be a prophet of God, a fearless witness for Jehovah in the midst of a sinful
generation. Hence this sublime lip consecration.

Exactly so with the church at Pentecost. The promise of Christ was: "Ye shall
receive power after that Holy Ghost has come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto
me.” My brethren, you cannot overestimate the importance of lip-service in the kingdom
of Jesus. No more altars! No more sacrifices! No more shedding of blood! No more
burning of incense! And yet we have a sacrifice. “By him therefore” “says the apostle”
let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips.” Not the
firstlings of the flock but the sanctified speech; not the blood of bulls and goats, but
sacrificial words of which Christ crucified is the burden and the theme. Hence observe
the first thing said of the church after the day of Pentecost. And they were all filled with
the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.
Ah, that is what we want in the church today to give it power. Secular tongues exchanged
for spiritual; the tongue that can persuade to a good bargain, now pleading just as
powerfully for the acceptance of Christ; the tongue inclined to foolish jesting, now
sanctified to serious praise. The apostle James pays a high tribute to the tongue: “Even
so the tongue is a little member and boasteth great things. Behold how much wood is
kindled by so small a fire” (R.V.) It is true in a good sense as well as in a bad. Let the
fire of Pentecost fall on a tongue and how the wood hay and stubble of worldly
Christianity is burning up before it. O ye to whom the Holy Ghost has given new hearts.
Come ye to the altar and get new tongues, that you may tell out the love of God and
mightily persuade men to believe.