

The Change In William Law from when he wrote, "Serious Call" to when he wrote "Power in the Spirit

The change that came into Law's life, had its entrances from Law's eight year study of Jacob Boehme, during this eight years, our dear brother put his mighty pen down, he wrote nothing during this entire eight year span.

After picking up his pen again, we have a new brother, with a deeper understanding of the truth, and of the grace of God.

It is a strange thing to me, that after this mighty overhaul of his whole being, that many were offended by his future writings. How strange to me, that after this brother saw a great light, and put that light down on paper, many, most, still clung to his older writings!

We will compare two of his writings, one of his early writings, (Before brother Boehme) A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, and his last writing, The Power of the Spirit (After brother Boehme.)

Both of these writings convey a deep concern for the daily life of believers. He observed that the living of professing Christians did not match the Word of God. Both of these books have this same thought, but the way in which Law exhorts his readers differs in these two writings.

It should be added that herein is where the Wesley brothers started to find fault with brother Law, if you understand this, you will learn much about these three men.

The Believers Salvation

In A Serious Call Law stresses the need of a strong determination on the part of believers to change their ways. In The Power of the Spirit, Law stresses the work of the Holy Spirit in changing people's lives. Let us compare a few quotes.

In Law's A Serious Call he says:

The salvation of our souls is set forth in Scripture as a thing of difficulty, requiring all diligence and to be worked out with fear and trembling. The Christian life is pictured as continuous striving, and many will fail to attain salvation, not because they took no pains or care about it, but because they did not take pains and care enough.

Weak and imperfect men shall, notwithstanding their frailties and defects, should be received as having pleased God if they have done their utmost to please him. We cannot offer to God the service of angels. We cannot obey him as if we were in a state of perfection. But fallen men can do their best, and this is the perfection that is required of us. If we stop short of this we stop short of the mercy of God under the terms of the gospel. God has there made no promises of mercy to the slothful and negligent. His mercy is offered only to our frail and imperfect but best endeavors to practice all manner of righteousness. The best way for anyone to know how much he ought to aspire after holiness is to consider how much he thinks will make him easy at the hour of death. Now any man who dares be so serious as to put this question to himself will be forced to answer that at death he will wish he had been as perfect as human nature can be. Is not this, therefore, sufficient to make us not only wish for but work for that degree of perfection (p. 26-27)

Concerning salvation, Law stresses difficulty, diligence, continuous striving, doing one's utmost to please God, no mercy to the slothful and negligent and doing our best to endeavor. This implies that salvation is dependent upon man's effort. If you don't try hard enough you will not obtain salvation.

This is in contrast to his last writing. In *The Power of the Spirit* he writes:

A new birth of this Spirit of God in man is as necessary to make fallen man alive again unto God as it was to make Adam at first in the image and likeness of God. And a constant flow of the divine life by the Spirit is as necessary to man's continuance in his redeemed state as light and moisture are to the continued life of a plant. A religion that is not wholly built upon this supernatural ground, but which stands to any degree upon human powers, reasonings, and conclusions, has not so much as the shadow of truth in it. Such religion leaves man with mere empty forms and images that can no more restore divine life to his soul than an idol of clay or wood could create another Adam.

True Christianity is nothing but the continual dependence upon God through Christ for all life, light, and virtue; and the false religion of Satan is to seek that goodness from any other source. So the true child of God acknowledges that "no man can receive anything except it be given him from above." All goodness comes from God just as surely as all life comes from God.... Man's fall from his first state brought a separation from God and thus from the life, light, and virtue which is in Him. Man's salvation can therefore only be effected by a reconciling union of his spirit with the Spirit of the Creator. "Be ye reconciled to God," wrote Paul. Nor can this reconciliation be accomplished by man's own efforts, but it must by its very nature be a gift from God. No angel or man could begin to show any love, faith, or desire toward God, without a living seed of these divine affections being first formed within him by the Spirit of God. ... Therefore the continuous inspiration and working of the Holy Spirit in the spirit of man is no less essential to that salvation which God has provided through Jesus Christ than the new birth itself. (p. 15-16)

This excerpt shows reconciliation (a part of salvation) as being a gift from God. Salvation does not stand upon human powers, reasonings, and conclusions. Reconciliation is a gift from God. Furthermore, it is the Spirit of God that forms love, faith, and desire within man toward God. This shows a development in

Law's writing from man's effort to God's operation through the Spirit.

The Use of Man's Reason

Another portion from A Serious Call indicates Law's view concerning the use of man's reason, living by law and conducting oneself by rules and principles that others admire:

Any devout man makes a true use of his reason. He sees through the vanity of the world, discovers the corruption of his nature, and admits the blindness of his passion. He lives by a law that is not visible to vulgar eyes; he sets eternity against time; and he chooses rather to be forever great in the presence of God than to have the greatest share of worldly pleasure while he lives. He who is devout is full of these great thoughts. He lives upon these noble reflections, and conducts himself by rules and principles that can be apprehended, admired, and loved only by reason. There is nothing, therefore, that shows so great a genius, nothing that so plainly declares a heroic greatness of mind, as great devotion. When you suppose a man to be a saint you have raised him as much above all other conditions of life as a philosopher is above an animal.... Reason is our universal law that obliges us in all places and at all times. No actions have any honor but so far as they are instances of our obedience to reason. (pp. 157-158)

Compare this excerpt with the following. In The Power of the Spirit Law seems to have developed a different understanding concerning the exercise of reason regarding the spiritual things.

What makes a man a sinner? Nothing but the power and working of his own will in independence from God. And what does his will follow in determining its choice, if not his own natural reason? Did not Satan appeal to Eve's reason, in enticing her to eat of the forbidden fruit? And therefore, if our natural reason is not to be denied, we must keep up and follow that which works all sin in us. For no man could be responsible or judged of God any more than the beasts except that his carnality has all its evil from his intelligent nature, reason being the life and power of it. "For the

carnal mind is at enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." And what is the carnal mind, if it is not our natural reason?

We have no spiritual need except for a restoration of the divine nature in us. And if this be true, then nothing can be our salvation except that which brings us into a right relationship with God, making us partakers of the divine nature in such a manner and degree as we need. But to reason about life cannot communicate it to the soul, nor can a religion of rational notions and opinions logically deduced from Scripture words bring the reality of the gospel into our lives. Do we not see sinners of all sorts, and men under the power of every corrupt passion, equally zealous for such a religion? How is it then that Christian leaders spend so much time reasoning about Scripture doctrines, and yet remain so blind to the obvious fact that filling the head with right notions of Christ can never give to the heart the reality of His Spirit and life? For logical reasoning about Scripture words and doctrines will do no more to remove pride, hypocrisy, envy, or malice from the soul of man, than logical reasoning about geometry. The one leaves man as empty of the life of God in Christ as the other. Yet the church is filled with professing Christians whose faith has never gone beyond a conviction that the words of Scripture are true. They believe in the Christ of the Bible, but do not know Him personally. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is sound doctrine to their minds, but their lives are empty of His manifest power either to overcome the power of sin within, or to convert others to Christ. Though many are zealous to preach the gospel, yet instead of bringing men to Christ, they seek to reason them into a trust in their own learned opinions about Scripture doctrines. In contrast to Paul, their gospel is in word only, without the demonstration and power of the Spirit. Nor can they see their need of the Holy Spirit to fill them with Christ, and then to overflow through them in rivers of living water to others, because reason tells them that they are sound in the letter of doctrine. pp. 102-104

God does not demand a faith that is unreasonable - but He does demand a faith that goes beyond the limits of human reason. And

thus there is a point where faith and reason divide the human race into two kinds of men fully distinct from each other. The faithful through every age are the children of God, and sure heirs of His redemption through Jesus Christ. Those who trust in reason alone are of the seed of the serpent, and real heirs of that confusion which happened to the first builders of the tower of Babel. To live by faith is to be truly and fully in covenant with God; to reject that which reason cannot verify is to be merely and solely in compact with ourselves, with our own vanity and blindness, and with Satan who first led the race into this sad state. pp. 106-107

Law sees that man's fall was due to his exercise of reason in independence from God. If man does not deny his natural reason but continues in it then he will continue in the way of sin. Reasoning does not bring us into a relationship with God. However, Law states that a relationship with God is brought about by being a partaker of the divine nature.

The Believers' Living and Conduct

In addressing the believers living and conduct, Law, in A Serious Call, stresses practising doctrines. If the doctrines of Christianity were practiced, they would make a man as different from other people as a civilized man is different from a savage. If the doctrines of Christianity were practiced, it would be as easy a thing to know a Christian by the outward course of his life as it is now difficult to find a person who lives the Christian life. (p.20)

Again, let the gentleman of birth and fortune but have this intention and you will see how it will carry him from every appearance of evil to every evidence of devotion and goodness. He does not ask what is allowable and pardonable, but what is commendable and praiseworthy. He will not, therefore, look at the lives of Christians to learn how he ought to spend his estate, but he will look into the Scriptures and make every doctrine, parable, precept, or instruction that relates to rich men a law to himself in the use of his estate. He will deny himself the pleasures and indulgences that his estate could procure because

our blessed Saviour saith, " Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation" (Luke 6:24)7

In Law's later writing he emphasizes the Holy Spirit's inspiration of God's Word, and the Spirit's dwelling in and working in the believers.

Without the present illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God must remain a dead letter to every man, no matter how intelligent or well-educated he may be....To say that because we now have all the writings of Scripture complete we no longer need the miraculous inspiration of the Spirit among men as in former days, is a degree of blindness as great as any that can be charged upon the scribes and Pharisees.... the Scriptures should only be read in an attitude of prayer, trusting to the inward working of the Holy Spirit to make their truths a living reality within us. pp. 61-62

The fruits of the Spirit, so often mentioned in Scripture, are not things different or separate from the Spirit; and if the Spirit be not dwelling and working in us, His fruits must be as absent from us as He is. If there is not granted by God a "divine encounter" and the inner realization that the fruits and gifts of the Spirit proceed from His present workings in our hearts, then how could we know that they are of the Spirit? For the fruits of the Spirit are living, and can only be living in us as the Spirit manifests Himself through us. And since the "manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit thereby," how can any deny such present workings of the Holy Spirit in the church, unless they also deny His presence? p. 66