

Articles IX to XIV

In Articles I to VIII we have been dealing with the great doctrines of the faith, as these are taught in Scripture and implied in Christian experience. In Articles IX to XIV we turn to the life of the believer, and contemplate its rise and progress in the soul. The following divisions may help to clearness in study and exposition.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

A. Its Source, in the Divine operation—Article IX.—Of Regeneration.

B. Its Beginning in the Individual—Article X.—Of Faith and Repentance.

C. The Standing of the Believer—Article XI.—Of Justification and Sonship.

D. Growth in Grace—Article XII.—Of Sanctification.

E. The Soul's Chief Exercise—Article XIII.—Of Prayer.

F. The Norm and Standard of Christian Living—Article XIV.—Of the Law of God.

Plainly these are topics familiar to the preacher, and need but little here in the way of elucidation and comment. Little more will be required than a brief analysis of each article, noting the method observed in dealing with its special topic.

CHAPTER X

ARTICLE IX.—*Of Regeneration.*—We believe in the necessity of regeneration, whereby we are made new creatures in Christ Jesus by the Spirit of God, who imparts spiritual life by the gracious and mysterious operation of His power, using as the ordinary means the truths of His word and the ordinances of divine appointment in ways agreeable to the nature of man.

No one can read the New Testament, and enter sympathetically into the life it depicts, without observing the thrilling note of wonder and surprise. The people, who appear in these pages, are possessed with the newness of the life they are living and of the spiritual realm they are living in. (See Denney's articles "Regeneration," in H, D, C, G.) The change they have undergone, the transition they have made, is comparable to nothing less absolute than a new birth or a new creation. It is under the former image that the origination of the Christian life is commonly contemplated in theological and devotional writings. This article, dealing with the source of the Christian life, as a new birth or regeneration, notes: (1) The Necessity of this Divine creative act. The imperative rings out, addressed to the conscience of every man—"Ye must be born again." And the conscience, unless it has been seared by self-righteousness, or sophisticated by a shallow dogmatism, acknowledges the impact of the truth. We mortal men live under a law of moral continuity, from which there is no

deliverance by any effort of ours. We cannot wrench ourselves free. We cannot throw off the burden by any dead lift. We cannot enter into life, lying as we do under a moral paralysis. A change must take place within us, before the life of God can begin in us. In this matter we are not creators, but recipients. The spiritual life, like the natural, is a Divine creative act. (2) The Power that alone is adequate. How can a change so radical, so complete, reaching to the depths of our spiritual life, and extending to its further manifestations in character, be brought about? How does the creative force act? Certain answers need not detain us. "Baptismal regeneration," the idea that a physical act can produce this profound mystery of a new life in the soul, is a mere trifling with the subject. The contribution of Nicodemus to the subject is scarcely wiser—let there be an intellectual influence, a teaching, an education, and the new life will come in. The roots of religion are not in the intellect. As it has been put—"Educate," says Nicodemus; "Regenerate" is the word of Jesus. This brings us back to the point—How? What the power? How does it act? It is Nicodemus' question; the answer lies in the reply of Jesus.

(a) There is a power that can effect even so great a change as this. It is the power of the Spirit of God. To Jesus, as to the prophets of the Old Testament, the Spirit is not conceived statically, or emotionally, but dynamically. The Spirit *is* power, the very power of God, working creatively. All the

power of God is needed to make a man a Christian. All Christian souls make this confession. (b) This power is competent to do the impossible. From the flesh nothing can be born but flesh. The Spirit and He alone, is competent to create the spiritual life in the Soul. (c) The Spirit, as Power, is mysterious in itself and in its operation. Its analogy in nature is the wind, of which it is impossible to tell "whence it cometh and whither it goeth." "So is every one that is born of the Spirit." The Christian is a man wondered at. The Christian character is the reverse of commonplace. It is full of surprising possibilities, extraordinary achievements, depths and heights which those, who live at the world's level, know nothing of. (d) The operation of the Spirit while mysterious, is not magical. It is discernible, and its nature is known, in the effects it produces. The wind is mysterious, blowing where it listeth, but we do hear the sound thereof. Tenfold more mysterious is the power of God in the regeneration of the soul. But we do know what it works, in the Church at large, and in the lives and characters of individuals. Church history and Christian biography are full of moral and religious effects, of which we can say nothing else than, "See what God hath wrought! This is a new creation—a birth from above." (3) The Means commonly employed. Mysterious, but not magical. God is not a conjurer, though His work is beyond the compass of our intelligence. He does not invade, or overwhelm, or crush, the human nature that He has made in His

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own image. That nature lies open to His influence. The powers, gifts, capacities, susceptibilities, are appealed to, touched, quickened by the Spirit of God, according to their place and function in the whole spiritual organism. It is obviously impossible to enumerate the ways or stereotype the methods which God follows in dealing with soul after soul. Records, questionnaires, etc., reveal endless diversity. Literature abounds, and is usually instructive. The pastor should compile records, for his private use, out of the many cases that arise in his cure of souls. But, broadly, there are two outstanding means which God deviseth, that His banished be not expelled from Him. The one is His Word, and the other is the ordinances of His own appointment. If the records could be compiled, there is no doubt the ascertained result would be that, in the vast majority of cases, the Spirit had used, as means for his gracious operation some portion of Scripture, or some season of Christian fellowship and worship.

Whatever the specific mode of the Spirit's working may be, the outcome is before us—a "new creation in Christ Jesus." A man new made! He in Christ, and Christ in him; living from a new centre, with new energies, to new consummations.