

The Experience of Life:

Regeneration & Clearance of the Past

by Witness Lee

The experience of Christ is the experience of life, the divine life. When we experience the divine life, in fact, we are experiencing Christ in His unsearchable riches. First John 5:12 says, "He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life." The divine life and the Son are inseparable in our experience. In reading a journal such as *Affirmation & Critique*, which focuses on a presentation of the divine truth, both through exposition and critical analysis, it would be easy to conclude that matters of experience are secondary. On the contrary, all truth is for our experience, and many matters of Christian experience require that we attend to simple practices which promote the growth and development of the divine life that we have received through faith in Christ. In this and subsequent issues of *Affirmation & Critique*, we would like to present some of the practices which are essential for our experience of Christ. A Christian who desires to advance toward the goal of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus never advances beyond the need to attend to these simple matters. This article is taken from the 1968 edition of *The Experience of Life* published by *Living Stream Ministry*.

The first stage of the experience of life is being in Christ. This is due to the fact that our first relationship with Christ results in our being in Christ. Before we were saved, we were outside of Christ; we were in Adam. But when we are regenerated, God translates us into Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). The experience of this stage, from our point of view, may be said to be the stage of salvation or the stage of regeneration, but from the standpoint of our relationship with Christ, it is simply being in Christ.

Regeneration

The first experience of the first stage is regeneration. From the point of view of knowing life, regeneration means that in addition to his original life man obtains the life of God. But from the standpoint of experience, what, actually, is regeneration, and what are the conditions of regeneration?

Regeneration Is That Part in the Experience of Salvation Which Is a Matter of Life

The story of how we were saved is the story of how we

experienced God's salvation. God's salvation is exceedingly full and complete. It includes forgiveness of sins, cleansing, sanctification, justification, freedom from bondage, regeneration, etc.—all these are parts of God's salvation. Of all these parts, only regeneration is the part of life. The forgiveness of our sins is not a matter of life; neither are the cleansing of our sins, our being sanctified, and our being justified matters of life. Even our being set free from bondage cannot absolutely be a matter of life, since part of this experience has to do with release from the law and another part with freedom from the bondage of sin, and these parts are not entirely of life. All these are only what God has done upon us. Only regeneration is the part of life in God's salvation. Therefore, when we experience God's salvation, only regeneration is the experience of that part which is of life.

Regeneration Is the Center of the Experience of Salvation

Since regeneration is the part which is of life in the experience of salvation, it is then the center of the experience of salvation, because the central purpose of God in saving us is that we may have His life. It is for this that He has forgiven our sins; it is for this that He has cleansed us; it is for this that He has sanctified us; it is for this that He has justified us; and it is for this that He has set us free. He has done all these for one purpose—regeneration. Regeneration, therefore, is the central part of God's salvation, and it is also the central part of our experience of God's salvation.

Regeneration Is the Beginning of the Experience of Life

The first experience of life is regeneration. Without regeneration we have not yet begun our experience of life.

When we are regenerated, we then begin to experience life. Therefore, from the standpoint of experience, regeneration is the beginning of the experience of life.

Regeneration Is the Entering into Us of God's Life

Since regeneration is the obtaining of God's life in addition to our original life, the moment we are regenerated is the very moment God's life enters into us. Regeneration, therefore, is the entering into us of God's life.

Regeneration Is the Birth of Christ within Us

Regeneration is not only the entering into us of God's life; it is also the birth of Christ within us. As God's life enters into us in Christ and regenerates us, it is on one hand God's life entering into us, and on the other hand it can be said that Christ is born in us. The birth of Christ in us means that Christ is born once more. Every time a man is regenerated, Christ is born once more in humanity. Hence, regeneration is the birth of Christ within us.

Regeneration Is the Beginning of the New Man

Regeneration is also the beginning of the new man within us. All our experiences of spiritual life are matters of the new man within us, and this new man begins at the time of our regeneration. Before we are regenerated, we are in Adam, a fallen sinner, the old man. Once we are regenerated, God's life in Christ enters into us. This life is a new element, and when it mingles with our spirit, it becomes the new man within us. Therefore, every one of us who has been regenerated is a double man: we are on one hand the old man in Adam, fallen; and we are on the other hand the new man in Christ, saved. This new man begins at the time of our regeneration. Hence, regeneration is the beginning of the new man.

The Conditions of Regeneration

The experience of regeneration is especially related to four things: our nature, our heart, our spirit, and God's life. From the aspects of these four things, therefore, we will look at our condition before regeneration, during regeneration, and after regeneration.

The Condition before Regeneration. Firstly, our nature is corrupted. Jeremiah 17:9 says: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it?" Although this verse speaks of man's heart, it actually refers to man's nature. Thus we see that before regeneration our original nature is deceitful and crooked, extremely corrupted, and unable to match God's nature.

Secondly, the heart is hardened toward God. Ezekiel 36:26 speaks of our original heart as a "stony heart." This

means that before regeneration our heart toward God is always rebellious, stubborn, and as hard as stone.

Thirdly, our spirit is dead toward God. Before regeneration, because of sins (Eph. 2:1), our spirit is dead toward God and has lost its function to contact God. We cannot, therefore, have fellowship with God nor can we understand the spiritual things of God.

Fourthly, man is separated from God's life. Since the nature of a man who is not regenerated is corrupted, his heart toward God is hardened, and his spirit toward God is dead; his entire person, therefore, is separated from God's life (Eph. 4:18). This is our condition before regeneration.

The Condition during Our Experience of Regeneration. Firstly, we see that our nature is corrupt. Although before regeneration our nature was corrupt, yet we did not know it. It is at the time of experiencing regeneration, because of the Holy Spirit's enlightenment, that we see ourselves to be corrupt. At this time we see not only that our external deeds are corrupt, but also that our inner nature is corrupt.

Secondly, our heart is contrite and repentant toward God. When we experience regeneration and the Holy Spirit enlightens us, we see ourselves as corrupt, sinning against God and man. Our heart then reproaches us and is contrite and repentant before God.

Thirdly, our spirit is contrite toward God. Because of the repentance of our heart, the spirit deep within us also feels extremely contrite. Our spirit at this time is like that of Psalm 51:17, "a broken spirit." When we are being regenerated of the Holy Spirit, our spirit deep within feels contrite—indeed, as if it were broken.

Fourthly, man contacts God's life. Since man sinned and fell and was driven out of the Garden of Eden, the cherubim with the flaming sword guarded the way of the tree of life (Gen. 3:24), so that man could no longer contact it and thereby obtain God's life. Not until the Lord Jesus shed His blood and died on the cross, thus satisfying the demand of God's glory, holiness, and righteousness, was the way which leads to God's life opened. Therefore, at the time of our regeneration, because of our contrition, repentance, and faith in receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, we can then contact in our spirit the life of God which is in Him. For the life of God is in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 5:11).

The Condition after Regeneration. Firstly, we feel that our nature is corrupt. At the time of regeneration, we see that our nature is corrupt. After regeneration, because of that initial seeing, we always feel that our own nature is corrupt.

Secondly, our heart is softened toward God. Our heart, which is as hard as stone toward God before regeneration, having experienced repentance at the time of regeneration, is softened toward God and becomes “a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26). Our heart, having been softened, desires to love God and draws near to God; it longs to contact spiritual things and gladly receives and obeys God’s commands; it is not stubborn nor rebellious; although at times it is unable to obey, yet it is still willing to obey.

Thirdly, our spirit is alive toward God. The spirit that was dead before regeneration, because of its contact with God’s life at regeneration, has been quickened by the resurrection power of God. The spirit, having been quickened, is able to contact God, to fellowship with God, to apprehend the spiritual things of God, and it has the strength to do God’s will.

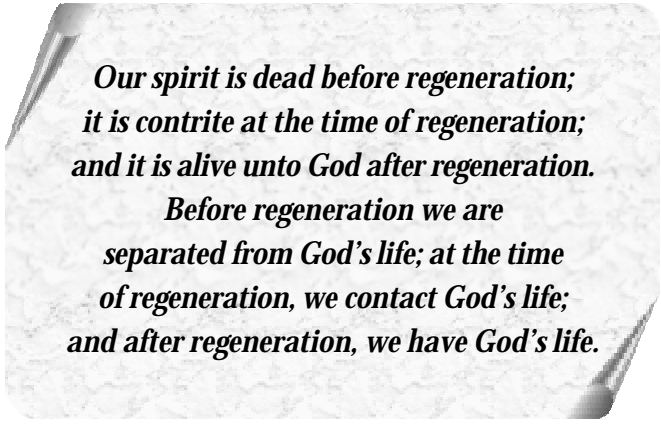
Fourthly, we have God’s life. Because we have contacted and received God’s life during regeneration, we have the life of God within us. At the same time we also have God’s nature, since God’s nature is in God’s life.

When we speak of the experience of regeneration, therefore, in regard to the aspects of these four things, our nature, our heart, our spirit, and God’s life, the changes which have taken place before and after regeneration are all very clear. Our nature before regeneration is corrupt; at the time of regeneration, we see that it is corrupt; and after regeneration, we always feel that it is corrupt. Our heart is hard toward God before regeneration; at the time of regeneration it becomes deeply repentant; and after regeneration, it is softened toward God. Our spirit is dead before regeneration; it is contrite at the time of regeneration; and it is alive unto God after regeneration. Before regeneration we are separated from God’s life; at the time of regeneration, we contact God’s life; and after regeneration, we have God’s life. If we are clear regarding these few points, we then have a thorough understanding of the experience of regeneration.

Clearance of the Past

Now we will look straightway at the second experience of life, namely, the clearance of the past.

Strictly speaking, the clearance of the past cannot be regarded as an experience of life in itself. It can only be considered as an appendix to the experience of regeneration, since a man who has been truly regenerated and saved will naturally bring all his past to an end. The normal experience, therefore, of regeneration certainly includes the element of the ending of the past. But because there are some who do not seem to be well regenerated and saved in a thoroughgoing way, although



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they have indeed been regenerated and saved, their past has not been immediately cleared. Not until they are once more revived by the Lord do they make up this lesson of clearing the past. It is proper, therefore, that we separate the regeneration and the clearance of the past and consider them as two distinct experiences of life.

Scriptural Basis

There is no clear teaching in the Scripture concerning the clearance of the past, but there are two very good examples: one is found in Luke 19:1-10—the story of Zacchaeus’s dealing with the past after his salvation; the other is in Acts 19:18-19—the account of the Ephesians’ clearance of the past after their being saved.

In Luke 19 we are told that as soon as Zacchaeus was saved, he immediately felt that he had extorted others in the past and was thus unrighteous; he also felt that he was a money lover with a stingy manner of living. He said therefore to the Lord that if he had taken anything from any man by false accusation, he would willingly restore him fourfold. Furthermore, he was willing to give half his goods to the poor. This was his clearance of the past. In Acts 19 we are told that many of the Ephesian saints, having been saved through Paul’s leading, came to confess their deeds, many of them willingly bringing their books of charms and burning them before the people. This was their clearance of the past.

The Object of the Clearance of the Past

What are the things of the past that need to be cleared away after we are saved? What are the objects which must be ended and cleared up? Altogether there are four categories: 1) unrighteous matters, 2) improper matters, 3) evil and unclean matters, 4) old ways of living. After we have been saved, there needs to be a clearing up and conclusion of these matters.

Unrighteous matters. Unrighteous means unjust, illegal. All we have obtained in the past by unjust, illegal means,

such as stealing, swindling, taking by force, encroaching upon others' properties, keeping things that have been lost by others, not returning things that were borrowed long ago, and all illegitimate relations with others and unjust dealings toward others—all these unrighteous matters—are things we should clear up.

Improper matters. Improper and unrighteous are close in meaning, and yet they are different. Unrighteous means that the method by which a certain thing is obtained, or the relationship of a certain matter, is unjust or illegal. Improper means that the very nature of a certain thing or matter is improper or indecent. For instance, things used in gambling and drinking can be bought and obtained by legal means; but these things are used for gambling and drinking. Since both gambling and drinking are improper and indecent, the very nature of these things is also improper and indecent. Furthermore, neither smoking nor reading obscene novels can be said to be unrighteous, but surely they are immoral and improper. All these improper matters are also things we should put to an end.

Evil and unclean matters. Evil and unclean matters are things related to idols, such as graven or portrait idols, candlesticks and censers used in idol worship; ornaments, furniture, and clothing with the image of the dragon; writings of worldly religions; unclean things related to curious arts, such as books on horoscope, physiognomy, charms, etc.; also evil and unclean things, such as worshipping idols, worshipping ancestors, divining, fortune-telling, etc. These are hated by God even more than the things in the first two categories, and they are certainly intolerable to the life within us, which is holy and clean. Therefore, even more so must these things be thoroughly put to an end.

Old ways of living. Old ways of living refer to our entire old manner of living before we were saved. After we are saved, we should not only put an end to all unrighteous, improper, and evil and unclean matters, but we must also put an end to our whole former manner of living and have a new beginning.

Usually, when we speak of the clearance of the past, we emphasize the ending of unrighteous, improper, and evil and unclean matters, but we are not likely to pay any attention to the ending of the old way of living. This is insufficient. As a matter of fact, when a man is regenerated, his old way of living ceases at once. Since regeneration enables man to obtain a new life, it naturally brings to man a new way of living. The old way of living ends with the old life, and the new way of living begins with the new life. Thus man has changed to a new human living. It can be said, therefore, that what really wrecks the old manner of living is the salvation of the Lord. Whoever receives the Lord's salvation has his old human

living wrecked and terminated, and his new human living begun and being built up.

How then should we regard the ending of the old human living and the beginning of the new? We are not saying that after a person is regenerated he should change his present occupation—stop going to school, close his business, ignore caring for his family—and go out preaching. The ending of the old human living means that after a person is regenerated, he may continue in his original profession, provided that it is proper, but the taste within him is changed, his mood is changed, and his feeling is changed. No matter what a person does before he is regenerated, his taste, his mood, and his feeling are all toward the world, all desiring to accomplish something in the world. The more he works, the more he relishes his work and the deeper he enters into it. But after regeneration, when God's life enters into him, that taste within him becomes tasteless, that mood is changed, and his feeling is also changed. He even has a different taste for eating, clothing, and other daily necessities. In this sense, his old way of living is ended, and his old life comes to a conclusion.

We have referred to Zacchaeus's clearance of his past. His clearance included the ending of his old way of living. Formerly he had extorted money from others and was thus unrighteous; so he put an end to his unrighteous deeds by restoring fourfold. Moreover, he also gave half his goods to the poor; that was to end his old way of living. Had he not given to the poor, would that be unrighteous? Would that be improper? Would that be evil and unclean? Indeed not! His unwillingness to give was his old way of living. In his former life he put an extreme value upon money; covetousness was his philosophy of life, and loving money was his old way of living. When he was saved and God's life entered into him, his concept concerning money was immediately changed; he esteemed it of little value; he was willing to give—this shows that his life was changed and his old way of covetous living was ended. This does not mean, of course, that after he ended his old way of living he did not possess or spend any more money. It is possible that afterward he still had much money and spent it. But his taste in possessing money was different; his taste in spending money was different. His old life was changed; his old way of living came to an end.

I recall my own experience of ending the old way of living. It was also a very evident change. When I was nearly twenty years old, I was pursuing the knowledge of this world, full of ambition and with great purpose. At this time a sister came to preach the gospel in my locality, and I was saved at the first listening. She spoke at that time from Exodus, telling how Pharaoh usurped the Israelites and would not allow them to leave Egypt. She said that

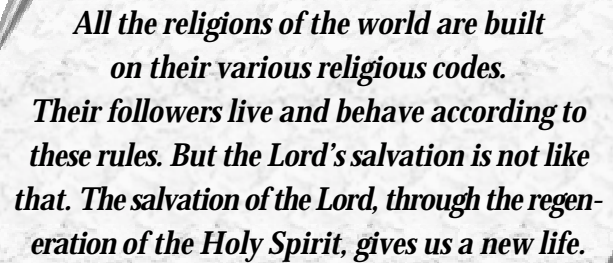
this typified Satan's usurping of man, not allowing him to worship God. Her words were indeed Spirit-inspired and moved me greatly. At that time I had a feeling within which said: "Never again do I want this world. I must serve God." Since then, this feeling within me has never died. On one hand, I felt that I could no longer walk in the way of this world and that it was henceforth no longer possible to possess my ambition and great purpose toward the world. On the other hand, I felt that a new path, a new life was before me, causing me to follow the Lord and go on. In this way, the taste within me was changed, my mood was changed, and my feeling was also changed. My old way of living then came to an end.

It seems difficult to find words to express these changes in taste, mood, and feeling, but they are definitely the result of being regenerated. Furthermore, the more thoroughly a person is regenerated, the more drastic these changes will be. For those who have more future in their enterprises or more accomplishment in society, the change will be more evident. Even those who are barely saved can still sense that these changes have taken place in their lives, although their experience of regeneration is not so clear. Once there are such changes within, the old way of living comes to an end.

Although this ending of the old way of living is a preliminary experience of a Christian, yet it has a deep effect upon his future walk with the Lord. When our old way of living comes to an end, our ambition and interest in the world are changed, our estimation and point of view toward men and all matters are also changed, and our purpose in life is different than before. Thus we can escape from all anxieties, leave all our burdens behind, and run the race in the way of the Lord.

Since this matter of ending the old way of living is so important, we must give heed in this matter of the clearance of the past, whether in self-examination or in leading others, to see that the old way of living is ended and that there is such a change in taste, mood, and feeling. If these changes are not great enough, we must look for a deeper work of the Holy Spirit to make them stronger and more weighty. The more drastic these changes are, the more thorough will be the ending of the old way of living.

Strictly speaking, it is not necessary to wait till after a person is saved before he can be led to consider this change in the old way of living. When we are preaching the gospel, it is also necessary to add this point to enable others to see that regeneration means a change in their human living. A certain kind of life must have a certain kind of living. If a man is regenerated, he obtains a new life, and his old life then naturally comes to an end. Thus, once a man is saved, he will have this change of affection, and it follows that he will have a good ending of the past.



All the religions of the world are built on their various religious codes. Their followers live and behave according to these rules. But the Lord's salvation is not like that. The salvation of the Lord, through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, gives us a new life.

The Basis of the Clearance of the Past

The clearance of the past is not based on the demand of outward regulations, but on the sense of life within. Although we have previously pointed out four matters which must necessarily be ended, yet these only enable us to recognize principles. They are not rules which demand that we put an end to such matters. When we are practicing the clearing of the past, what needs to be ended really depends on the sense of life within. Therefore, the sense of life within is the basis for our clearance of the past.

We know that all the religions of the world are built on their various religious codes. Their followers live and behave according to these rules. But the Lord's salvation is not like that. The salvation of the Lord, through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, gives us a new life. Since we have such a new life, we can now live and behave in the presence of God through the sense of this new life. This is the principle of all our living as Christians. Our clearance of the past is also based on this principle. When a person is regenerated and obtains God's life, this life moves within him, causing him to sense that in his past there have been many unrighteous, improper, and perverted matters, and that all these matters and even his entire old way of living are altogether incompatible with his present Christian state. Thus, he proceeds with his clearance of the past in accordance with these inner feelings.

The examples both of Zacchaeus and the Ephesian Christians clearing their past have also shown us that neither the Lord Jesus nor the apostle Paul clearly taught anything in regard to the clearance of the past; they did not give any rules demanding what one must do to end his past. The "ending" of Zacchaeus and the Ephesian Christians was such that, when the salvation of the Lord came upon them and the life of the Lord entered into them, they had a feeling toward the unrighteous and unclean things of the past and toward their old way of living; therefore, they put it all to an end. Their "ending" proves that this matter is not based on external regulations and teachings, but on the sense of life within.

However, when we are first saved, we do not necessarily sense all the things that need to be terminated. Although there are many matters which need to be cleared up, yet we are only conscious of a portion of them. Even so, we still need to put an end to that portion of which we are conscious. At any rate, whatever we are conscious of, that much we must put to an end. The area of our consciousness should be the extent of our clearance. As for those things of which we are not yet conscious, we need only continue to move on and grow in the life of the Lord; in the future the Lord will naturally cause us to sense them. At that time there will be further dealing and further clearance.

Once there was an elderly sister in whose home were two things: a silk lamp shade embroidered with dragons and a tea set also printed with a dragon design. Long after her salvation she did not sense anything. Then she was enlightened by the Lord and became possessed of a deep inner feeling toward these things. She had no peace whenever she saw these items with dragon designs. She then proceeded to destroy them according to her inner feeling.

In like manner, there was a brother who had an embroidering factory which specialized in making pajamas with dragon designs. In the beginning he lacked any feeling regarding this matter. Then one day he suddenly said to me: "Brother Lee, I feel that I cannot continue to run my factory. I am a Christian. How can I continue to sell clothing with dragon designs?" He proceeded to change his line of business in accordance with this feeling.

These two examples show how these people originally lived in the midst of unclean things without any feeling about them. Then one day, because of their love for the Lord, their following the Lord, and their allowing the life of the Lord to move actively within them, they felt the need of clearing up these matters. Accordingly, they obeyed their inner feeling and put an end to the past. This proves that the basis of clearing the past is the inner feeling of life.

Since the ending of the past is based on the sense of life within, we must continue to lay hold of this principle when we are leading others to end the past. Never establish for them any outward rules, teaching them that they ought to end this or that, but seek to stir the sense of life within and point them to that. We need first to cause others to know that the life of God is within them and lead them to know the sense of this life. Then, secondly, with the help of the ministry of the Word, spiritual literature,

and the testimonies of other saints regarding their clearance of the past, cause them also to have some feeling or deeper feeling regarding what needs to be terminated in their own past. Once this feeling has begun and has been deepened within them, we can lead them to clear up their past according to their own feeling. This manner of clearance is in accord with the principle of the Lord's salvation and can help others to truly grow in life.

The Degree of Ending the Past

How far should we go in putting an end to the things of the past? To what degree should we proceed? The degree is expressed in Romans 8:6 as "life and peace."

We have already seen that the ending of the past is based on the sense of life within. This sense of life within is a feeling given to us through the inner anointing of the Holy Spirit. Since the ending of our past is based on the sense of life within us, the procedure is the same as that mentioned in Romans 8:5-6, namely, following the Spirit, or minding the Spirit. The result, therefore, will naturally be the same—"life and peace." Thus, life and peace are the degree to which we are required to clear up the past. If we follow the demand of our inner feeling to make restitution, to confess our sins, to eliminate improper and unclean things, and to end our old way of living, we will surely feel strengthened, enlightened, satisfied, and enlivened; we will also feel peaceful, secure, and full of the presence of the Lord. If we have made a clearance of the things of the past and we still sense the lack of fullness and manifestation of life and peace, we may be sure that we have not followed the Spirit to the uttermost; we have not sufficiently satisfied the demand of the inner feeling. We must look to the Lord for grace that we may clear up things more thoroughly, until we are full of life and peace.

The witness of life and peace within is not sufficient, of course, to prove that all our past which needs to be cleared up has already been dealt with. It only indicates that we have attended to everything according to the demand of our inner feeling. It is possible that later, when our life has grown and our feeling increased, we will feel there is more which needs to be put to an end. At this time we must again follow the leading of this feeling and deal with these matters until we again sense life and peace. After several thorough clearances and dealings, we will have cleared up to a much better degree things, deeds, relations, and concepts of the past which are not pleasing to the Lord. We can then follow the Lord and go on without dragging. ✠

In the Next Issue—*The Experience of Life: Consecration*