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The Expulsive Power Of A New Affection



Synopsis

Thomas Chalmers (17 March 1780 – 31 May 1847), Scottish mathematician and a leader of the Free Church of Scotland, was born at Anstruther in Fife.

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You do not have to understand this concept for it to work in your life. It works this way whether you understand it or not. But to come to the understanding that THIS IS how it works will correct wrong thinking and wrong methods of wrestling with your own flesh to make it do what it was created to do. We do not "get rid of" wrong attitudes and old hurts. They are squeezed out in God's holy waste removal process that is most beautifully exposed in this fine old work from Chalmers, perhaps the best thing God ever spoke through him. God captures our minds and hearts and His own Spirit dwelling inside us creates a force that, like centripetal force, expels the old loves and desires and purposes of your life. I cannot recommend this work highly enough.

We are a civil war; inside of us war two opposing armies: the army of Flesh and the army of Christ.

The Christian life is a battle between these two. Some seasons in our life it seems the army of sin is marching unabated as it takes more ground upon our heart, and at other times it seems the army of Christ is triumphant and unbound in its reign. All Christians come to a point where they are crossed; a mystery unto themselves, and like Paul famously said, unable to figure out why they do what they don't want to do and can't do what they want to do. What then? How do we displace the love for the world from our hearts that Christ may reign? Pastor Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) in his famous sermon by the same title offers us a way. He says we need a new overpowering affection, a greater affection than the one we feel for sin. "The ascendant power of a second affection will do what no exposition however forcible, of the folly and worthlessness of the first, ever could effectuate." We shall never be able to arrest any of its leading pursuits, by a naked demonstration of their vanity. It is quite in vain to think of stopping one of these pursuits in any way else, but by stimulating to another. (pg.10). In other words, we can't just tell ourselves or others, "stop sinning." We must show ourselves a greater reason to stop: the glory and joy of Christ. The heart abhors a vacuum; a throne cannot stand without someone sitting upon it; our hearts must worship. But an unregenerate person or even a saved one who lives in unconfessed sin cannot imagine their heart without their particular god. Who shall I worship if not fame? or self-righteousness? or self? "If the throne which is placed there must have an occupier, and the tyrant that now reigns has occupied it wrongfully, he may not leave a bosom which would rather detain him than be left in desolation." (pg.18). Our identities can be so wrapped up in our manmade gods that to leave them without replacing them with something greater is like cutting off an arm or leg without the promise of something more. The key is to look up, and find our hope and joy and portion in God, who alone is our satisfaction. "He who believes that Christ hath broken down this wall (the wall of guilt and shame), finds a gathering radiance upon his soul, as he look onward in faith to the things that are unseen and eternal." (pg.26). It is the gospel, and only the gospel that has the power to replace the world's affections. It alone satisfies the heart's desire for worship and shows it its proper place of worship. "The object of the gospel is both to pacify the sinner and to purify his heart; and it is of importance to observe that what mars the one of these objects mars the other also. The best way of casting out an impure affection is to admit a pure one; and by the love of what is good, to expel the love of what is evil. Thus it is, that the freer the gospel, the more sanctifying is the gospel; and the more it is received as a doctrine of grace, the more will it be felt as a doctrine according to

godliness. (pg.28). Read those last two sentences again. How free is your gospel? How free is the gospel you've believed? Is it free enough to handle repeated sin? Is it free enough to handle gross sin that is culturally ashamed? Yes and yes! God is not afraid of your sin. It is this gospel that compels new affections to cast out old sins, but only in confession and thereby trust in that gospel can sinners truly understand the endless grace and goodness of Christ through the gospel. This is the message sinners need. This is the power that expels sin; to look unblinkingly at your sin, then from the cross hear the nail-pierced Savior say, "I forgive that too. Go and sin no more." Grace compels righteousness. I would recommend this book for all Christians. To even call it a book is a bit silly; it is a bound sermon totaling 31 pages. But it is 31 pages of gospel-soaked grace that can encourage anyone.

I like the content of this little book. It was recommended on some other website, I think. Tim Keller recommends it in his book *Gospel For Life*, but the English is surely different than books written today. Chalmers seems to write almost like a doctoral-level psychologist with rather academic language, and I'm finding it hard to wade through. In terms of content and it's beautiful stuff and the concept is absolutely true, I believe. It can even be seen in children: How do you take away one dangerous thing which they've become attached to? Offer them something else that will fascinate them for the moment. In terms of the Christian life, our desires and our affections must be brought into submission under the Lordship of Christ and our affection for Christ must become supreme to conquer all other unwanted distracting attachments that would interfere with worship of Christ.

Having come from a moralizing, legalistic "reformed" background, I find this to be a glorious truth that should be shouted from the rooftops. The plague of legalism hurts the progress of the Gospel on every hand. I meet more Christ-loving, obedient children of God who have shared how legalism had deadened their hearts and those around them. Nowhere is this more true than among those who claim to be reformed. The most wonderful quotes are near the end, where Chalmers noted that it is EXACTLY when the gospel of grace is most free that the hearts of God's people are most obedient. Yet, legalists spread the fear of antinomianism, leading to moralizing sermons and cold, dead religion, and churches full of self-satisfied Pharisees. Though I'm not sure how consistently this principle is understood, the resurgence of truly gospel-centric preaching holds out hope for revival. May the cold, dead religion of moralists and Pharisees be put to death, and gospel obedience by the Spirit's power shine forth, to the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. Titus 3:4-7.

Thomas Chalmers eloquently describes the alluring nature of God's grace and mercy. A skill many of us have neglected to learn and develop. Instead of mastering the art of describing the insurpassable beauty of Christ and His Salvation, we have focused on moralizing and relying on legislatures to enforce the morality we think society should live by. Only we, the Church, can offer an alternative to the immorality this world has to offer. Let us rededicate ourselves to the mastery of painting an alluring portrait of Christ with our lives and with our words.

The author's claim is fully summarized in the title: the only way to unseat "worldly" desires (or sin) is by latching on to a new desire (Jesus). I fully agree. The problem is that he says this in nearly every paragraph, with flowery and hard-to-understand language. The point is well taken but over-wrought.

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