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RENEWAL IN THE CHURCH

by

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"The Protestant Faith"

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RENEWAL IN THE CHURCH

When the Archbishop of Sydney announced recently that the American evangelist, Billy Graham, had accepted his invitation to re-visit Sydney, the Archbishop expressed the hope that this would mean a renewal for the Christian church; and all Christians will echo that hope and be regular in prayer that God may fulfil it, for we all desire a deeper Christian life in our church and deeper commitment to Christian principles in our community. But what is Christian renewal, and how is it to be brought about? In a word we may say that Christian renewal is the deepening of our love of God, of our love of Christ, of our sense of His presence in the Spirit, as God gives us His love so that we may love Him with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. Our thoughts dwell in His heavenly presence and our hope takes a strong hold of His inheritance. The love of God which He gives us brings joy and peace in believing, even in the midst of perhaps suffering, and it suffuses us with love for our fellows and energizes us into action for their welfare.

Christian renewal will mean deepening of the Christian brotherhood, a strengthening of one another in Christian commitment and Christian service, a concerted attack on the strongholds of darkness, a bold and faithful witness to Jesus. Christian renewal is simply God's almighty, all gracious presence in the life of the Christian and of the congregation. Where God is present, the fruit of His presence will be plain and active.

The key to spiritual renewal is simple in theory though seldom used in practise; it is seeking God's face with our whole heart. Prayer is primary, for God has promised His Holy Spirit, His presence, to

those who ask (Luke 11). But not, of course, to perfunctory asking but to earnest, heartfelt prayer which is tested for genuineness through perseverance. Along with prayer is, equally important, the preaching of God's word. Preaching and prayer was the ministry of Jesus and preaching and prayer was what the Apostles gave themselves to (Acts 6), but it must be preaching of God's word, that is to say, the making known of the mind of God in His complete message to man. If we pick and choose what we will preach our preaching will never bring renewal for God will not honour it. We must preach His message, not ours; and we must pray for strength to preach all that the Bible teaches in the proportions that the Bible emphasizes. We are to preach the love of God and the wrath of God, heaven and hell, the narrow way that leads to life and the broad way that leads to destruction, judgment and salvation, and above all preach Christ where God's sovereignty, God's humility, God's judgment and God's love and power enter our life very personally. Persevering prayer for God's presence, and faithful consecrated preaching of the Christian news will, through God's favour, bring spiritual renewal to the congregation and its members.

Christian renewal will be expressed firstly in deeper love for God and sense of His goodness to us and this will, in turn, flow out into obedience of His will by following the life and example of Jesus the Son of God. It will show itself in concern for other people and in serving them and their needs as Jesus did. There will also be obedience to the clear command "love not the world nor the things in the world" for it is not possible to love the world and to love God at the same time. Love of the world creeps into our lives and we must be conscious that we are to be obedient to the command "love

not the world neither the things in the world". At the same time we are to obey the command "set your mind on the things above where Christ is", for Christian renewal will certainly be characterised by heavenly mindedness, by a laying up of treasure in heaven, and by looking forward to the promise that God has given us that His kingdom will be fulfilled in the future when our Lord return to establish His kingdom of righteousness and love through the condemnation of what is wrong and the banishment of it from His presence, and the expression of all that is good. Our Lord is coming, and the eager expectation and firm assurance of this promise should characterize the Christian life, and a deepening of it and a rejoicing in it will be a sign of Christian renewal.

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