

“THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SCROOGE”

Years ago, while still in school (back before the Dead Sea got sick!), I read “A Christmas Carol, A Ghost Story of Christmas,” by Charles Dickens. I treated the reading of it as most students treat the reading of the “English classics,” as a necessary evil to pass the English literature requirements. I have since discovered with regard to many classics that I yawned my way through a treasure trove. I have also discovered that many (indeed, *all*) of the classics are supportive of the Gospel of Jesus Christ – either in a negative or positive manner. I have threatened to read Dickens’ story of Scrooge again for several years at Christmas time, but other duties of study and writing were always pressing during the Christmas season and I kept postponing the reading of it. I managed to see at least two versions of the story on film, but after reading the story, I know that no version on film captures the true and full content of the “Carol in prose,” as Dickens called it. I have discovered that to be true of most of the literary classics. After reading the book in each case, I have always been dissatisfied with the film version of it. A recent example is the first segment of J. R. R. Tolkien’s fantasy epic, “The Lord of the Rings.” The action-packed film version overwhelmed the message of the story as it was told in printed form. Whereas the printed version moved me greatly to see more clearly the cosmic struggle between good and evil, the same message presented on film was absorbed in the incredible stage-effects of the movie.

A few weeks ago, I began to read through the “Christmas Carol.” I read parts in large gulps, and re-read parts several times (and I am continuing to do this as Christmas approaches). Some parts I found to be a bit laborious, but those parts were worth the labor to get to the segments that I found most meaningful. After reading it casually, then carefully, then pleasurably, I hope to read it again each Christmas. Any Christian should find it loaded with lessons that are true to life and true to the Gospel (I believe the two to be the same; whatever is true to life is true to the Gospel, and vice versa). Though Dickens died more than 130 years ago, his Christmas story of goodness and greed has a timeless fascination to it. It is reported that Dickens wrote the story to generate some much-needed cash. Still, the powerful but tender story reached the hearts of multitudes from the very beginning. Many theories have been given to account for its popularity – the ghost story genre, the recreation of the look and feel of Elizabethan England, the attack upon basic human greed and selfishness, and many others. Since I am a convinced and committed Christian, I pity those who read it and miss the major and minor strains of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the story. I would like to explore some of those strains in this study, all the while reserving for myself the right to see too little, or too much, or too distortedly. I am certainly not a scholar on English literature, but I do know the Gospel, and I certainly can recognize its undertones wherever I see or hear them. Admittedly, many (wrongly) think the Gospel is nothing but bad news. Others think it is too good to be true. However, any knowledgeable Christian knows that it is inherently Good News, and that it is “too good not to be true.” So I am going to take the liberty to interpret “A Christmas Carol” through a Gospel lens.

The Gospel Umbrella

First, it is obvious to me that the story is written under a “Gospel umbrella.” If it is a true Christmas story, it cannot ignore the original Christmas story. Today, multitudes of people observe the “trappings” of Christmas while uneasily ignoring the truth of Christmas. Many more are deliberately blind, ignoring the great Christmas story as presented in the Bible, and choosing to cynically reject the great truth of the Virgin Birth of Christ. It is the Virgin Birth of Christ which protects and qualifies Jesus to be the sinless Savior of sinful men. Without it, Jesus is merely another man tainted with sin from the very beginning of his human life. No sinner can redeem himself, nor can he redeem other sinners. It is more than interesting that the most extensive account of the Virgin Birth in the entire Bible was written by a brilliant medical doctor named Luke.

Several overt Gospel references in the Scrooge story reveal the Gospel umbrella under which the story is written. When the ghost of Scrooge’s former business partner, Jacob Marley, appeared and conversed with Scrooge, Marley mournfully remembered his personal history with these words: “Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode!” Here is enough Gospel to challenge every indifferent or cynical unbeliever. Most people live like John Bunyan’s “Man with the muckrake.” Bunyan pictures the man with a garden hoe, working the soil in a field. The descriptive name which he uses, “the muckrake,” gives you a clue of his earth-boundedness. He spends his time raking in “muck,” a picture of the earthiness and limitation of short-sighted men. What the man with the muckrake does not know is that an angel hovers close above him with a golden crown in hand (representing the Gospel offer), ready to place it on the laborer’s head. The man only has to acknowledge the angel and the crown (spiritual reality) and accept the treasure (Jesus Christ Himself). But the man is so preoccupied with clods of dirt (!) that he misses the opportunity afforded him and continues in his poor course. Dickens shows Marley bemoaning exactly that personal mistake as he looks back upon his earthly life. The tragedy is that Marley realizes his mistake too late to correct it, and from the vantage point of life beyond death, wonders *why* he could have missed the message. In Marley’s reference, the Gospel is front and center.

In a second reference, when Scrooge is caught away to the home of his nephew, Dickens edits the account with these words: “It is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself.” I find myself wondering just how “mighty” its “Founder” was to Mr. Dickens. If Jesus was truly mighty in the personal experience of Mr. Dickens, he will enjoy the continuation and expansion of their relationship forever. If, however, his statement is merely a literary device, he has had time to this point to reevaluate everything, but he also knows that, unlike the Scrooge story, it is too late. Nonetheless, the Gospel umbrella is widely spread over the story.

Again, when Scrooge was transported to the home of Bob Cratchit in the final segment of the story, the hyperactive “little Cratchits” were sitting “as still as statues in

one corner, and sat looking up at Peter, who had a book before him.” Scrooge heard the words, “And He took a child and set him in the midst of them,” and wondered where he had heard those words? Where, indeed, but from the account of Jesus in the New Testament Gospels (Matthew 18:2)?

So the Gospel umbrella is spread over the entire story, and the Gospel aura penetrates every part of it.

The Gospel Parable

Not only does a Gospel umbrella cast its influence over the story; the story itself is a parable of the Gospel. In fact, being a longer story, it is not so much a *parabole* as a *paroimia*, an extended analogy. In some spots, it is almost allegorical. In the Scrooge story, Dickens was “skirting the Infinite,” touching the hem of the garment of God. J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis (as well as the other members of their “Inklings” literary group) spoke of “true myth.” Don’t be repelled by the word “myth.” To Tolkien, Lewis, and the others, “myth” is Divine truth that doesn’t fall in the category of “typical” human experience. And “true myth” means that, though the idea presented in the myth is unusual, it is marked by eternal verity and integrity. It was Tolkien who coined the word “eucatastrophe” when referring to the Death and Resurrection of Christ. A “eucatastrophe” is a cataclysmic crisis that is totally *good*. The Death and Resurrection of Christ certainly fall into that category. I am going to assume the license to draw the Gospel analogy from Dickens’ story as I see it.

First, the Scrooge story presents a vivid picture of *the bad news* which provides the background for the glorious Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The gaunt and stern pre-conversion picture of Mr. Scrooge comprises an excellent illustration of every human being as a sinner.

Listen to Mr. Dickens’ description of Ebenezer Scrooge: “Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dogdays; and didn’t thaw it one degree at Christmas.

“External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn’t know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet, could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often ‘came down’ handsomely, and Scrooge never did.”

Those paragraphs would form a tragic portrait of a wretched man if they stood alone, but they don’t. The portrait of Scrooge is consistent throughout the story until his redemption occurs at the end. Charles Dickens is renowned for his creation of buffoon

characters, exaggerations of comically ridiculous people. But is Scrooge a caricature? I think not! Of course, most sinners are not that *conspicuously* selfish, but they are that selfish. In fact, the account does not go nearly far enough in describing the inbred and incorrigible selfishness of the sinful human heart. If there is caricature in the portrait, it is that Mr. Scrooge always *looked* selfish and mean before *his* change. Many privileged sinners look frivolous and happy, but they are still hopelessly centered in themselves and dead toward God. Most of the teachings of the New Age movement sophisticate selfishness and idolize it as the personal answer to man's dissatisfaction, but it is actually a simple avoidance of reality.

According to the Bible, sin may be defined in its simplest meaning as egocentrism. Let the letters of the word "S – I – N" form an acrostic:

Self –
Ish –
Ness.

Two old friends had been reunited after years of no contact. One had become more renowned than the other, and talked a great deal about his renown. Suddenly he stopped and said, "I've talked about me long enough. Why don't *you* talk about me for awhile?" In that laughable story, we see the very nature of sin. Sin is autonomy, or self-law, that sets the person adrift from God. If not corrected, this chosen dereliction will last forever.

To define sin as selfishness may sound innocent, but let me remind you that it was nothing more nor less than selfishness that *created Satan, caused the fall of man, led to the construction of hell, confines every human sinner there forever, and crucified the loving and glorious Son of God.* George Macdonald was right when he said, "The one principle of hell is – 'I am my own.'" So all the protest of self-centered man against the idea of hell is totally unwarranted. *Hell is just God giving to sinful human beings what they have always wanted – life on their own terms, to "go it alone," doing without God.* This is the very same selfishness that lurks (of course, in its "innocent" form!) in you, and will produce the same final effects in you that it will have in Satan if unresolved by the grace of God! Each of us is "eccentric," displaced from our true Center. We are (each) hopelessly selfish, and this selfishness is the very essence of sin. This is the first fact in the bad news that forms the foil for the Gospel, and it is clearly symbolized by Charles Dickens in the person of Ebenezer Scrooge.

The tragic loneliness of Scrooge in Dickens' story is a picture of one of the sad consequences of sin. Remember Dickens' description of Scrooge, "Secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster." And again, "there he sat alone, quite alone in the world." Though many sinners surround themselves with companions here, and some engage in warm relationships, there is no way they can approximate "*the fellowship*" of believers, as Luke called it in the New Testament. The Bible pictures them in eternity as being like "wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." Again, this result only follows their choice to be derelict from God and all that is holy.

The “Christmas Carol” is true in adding several other touches to the bad news about man. It clearly indicates that sin has a binding and enslaving effect upon the sinner. Dickens presents this devastating truth in a graphic and picturesque way. The appearance of Marley’s ghost in Scrooge’s bedchamber is preceded by “a clanking noise, deep down below; as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine merchant’s cellar.” When Marley emerges from below, Scrooge “heard the sound much louder, on the floors below; then coming up the stairs, then coming straight towards his door.” When the ghost of Jacob Marley appears before Scrooge, “the chain he drew was clasped about his middle, and it was made of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel.” There seems to be no awareness on the part of either Marley or Scrooge that they knew *during their earthly lives* that they were forging such chains. The fact that Marley’s “body was transparent, so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind,” reminds me of the lost souls in C. S. Lewis’ The Great Divorce, each of which was a transparent and nebulous non-entity, having no substance at all. The idea is that only God, who made man, can give true substance to his personality and character. The person who lives a Godless, self-centered life will finally discover that nothing this world offers can give true fulfilment and substance to his life. Pascal said, “There is a God-shaped blank in the human heart,” and nothing less than God can fill it.

In the conversation that ensued upon the appearance of Marley’s ghost, Scrooge says to the ghost, “You are fettered. Tell me why?” “I wear the chain I forged in life,” replied the Ghost. “I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to *you*?”

“Scrooge trembled more and more. ‘Or would you know,’ pursued the Ghost, ‘the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have labored on it, since. It is a ponderous chain!’ Scrooge glanced about him on the floor, in the expectation of finding himself surrounded by some fifty or sixty fathoms of iron cable: but he could see nothing. ‘Jacob,’ he said, imploringly. ‘Old Jacob Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me, Jacob!’ ‘I have none to give,’ the Ghost replied. ‘It comes from other regions, Ebenezer Scrooge, and is conveyed by other ministers, to other kinds of men.’”

Let me encourage you to read the previous paragraph several times, and meditatively. Many Gospel dimensions can be detected in the words of both Scrooge and Marley’s Ghost.

A later paragraph in the story reveals how widespread the problem is. Dickens wrote, “The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley’s Ghost; none were free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. He had been quite familiar with one old ghost, in a white waistcoat, with a monstrous iron safe attached to its ankle. The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in

human matters, and had lost the power forever.” Note again the dimension of enforced loneliness, the need for social contribution but without the ability to make it.

Any student of the Bible will remember the words of Jesus, “Whoever commits sin is the *bondslave* of sin” (John 8:34), and Paul, “You *belong* as slaves to the power which you choose to obey, whether you choose sin, whose reward is death, or God, obedience to whom means the reward of righteousness?” (Romans 6:16). Sin in any of its selfish forms (greed, in Scrooge’s case) has an enslaving power, and there will be eternal repercussions.

Another Dickens “touch” of the bad news that sets the background for the Good News of the Gospel is the ominous declaration of the deadly consequences of sin in the life of an unconverted sinner. Scrooge’s nephew says of him, “His offences carry their own punishment.” When Scrooge was taken into the churchyard, the cemetery, by the Phantom of the future, he was forced to look upon his own grave. Scrooge admits, “Men’s courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead.” This can be interpreted as an admission that “the wages of (unrepented) sin is death” (Romans 6:23). “Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death” (James 1:15). This is a mere statement of fact, but most people resentfully take it as a threat. The law is irrevocable, and the protest of those locked in selfishness without God will not change it. Indeed, they decree their own destiny by choosing the center around which they will live.

“Only two philosophies occupy life’s shelf;
You will either live for Christ and others,
Or you will live for self.”

Here, then, are the negative precursors of the Gospel which may be easily seen in the “Christmas Carol” as told in prose by Charles Dickens.

Now, we will examine the *good news* that forms the very heart of the Gospel as seen in Dickens’ great story.

One Sunday morning, a family stayed home from church because the mother was sick. The little boy was watching television at eleven o’clock when the telecast of a church service came on. The little boy rushed into his mother’s bedroom and called out, “Momma, the news is on – and this time it’s about God!” The Gospel is news about God, it is *always* news, and it is *always good!*

As in the story of Scrooge, whose greedy course was interrupted by visitors from another world, God has intruded, intervened and interrupted our lives in redeeming love and grace. He loves us so much that He simply refused to live without us. However, if we stubbornly insist on our own way, God will not force Himself upon us. C. S. Lewis was right when he said, “There are only two kinds of people – those who say, ‘Not Thy will, but mine, be done,’ and they get their way and spend eternity with the person who fosters that selfish lifestyle, Satan, or those who say with Jesus, ‘Not my will, but Thine, be done,’ and *their* prayer is answered as they spend eternity with the One who modeled

that lifestyle.” The story of Scrooge reveals the need of every sinner for personal transformation. And this transformation comes from another world, if at all. It is “spiritual”, or “spirit-wrought,” in the Biblical sense.

As in the story of Scrooge, the individual sinner is led by the Gospel to clearly and painfully see his personal sins by a dynamic revelation. He will never realize how serious sin is to God, and thus to himself, without this revelation. Recall the illustrative statement in the “Christmas Carol”:

“‘You will be haunted,’ said the Ghost, ‘by Three Spirits.’ Scrooge’s countenance fell almost as low as the Ghost’s had done. ‘Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?’ he demanded, in a faltering voice. ‘It is.’ ‘I – I think I’d rather not,’ said Scrooge. ‘Without their visits,’ said the Ghost, ‘you cannot hope to shun the path I tread.’” The Ghost clearly indicates that Scrooge will never come to reformation if unaided, and the same is true of a self-entrenched sinner. And the necessary illumination and conviction are even more painful and unpleasant for the sinner than they were for Mr. Scrooge. He must see his sins as God sees them, and must agree with God about them (the word “confess” is *homologeō*, which means to “agree with another”), or the disqualification between him and God cannot be removed. However, as mentioned, he cannot and will not come to this position without a miracle work of the Holy Spirit. This miracle work is explained in John 16:7-11. Every born-again person will admit that this is precisely what has happened in his life to bring him to God. When conviction occurs, the individual sees himself as a helpless, shackled sinner. He is brought to a shattering awareness that begins the “unselfing” process, the process that will re-center him from the eccentricity of sin to his true Center.

In the “Christmas Carol,” Mr. Scrooge obviously experiences through his encounters with visitors from another world a remarkable and thorough conversion. In fact, it is presented as a kind of recurrence of childhood, and this is precisely the way the Gospel presents Christian conversion. Dickens explains the spirit of those in the household of Scrooge’s nephew by saying, “It is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself.” Later, the thoroughly transformed Scrooge is exulting in his conversion. “‘I don’t know what to do!’ cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath. ‘I am as light as a feather, I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world. Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo! Ha, ha, ha!’ Really, for a man who had been out of practice for so many years, it was a splendid laugh, a most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs! ‘I don’t know what day of the month it is!’ said Scrooge. ‘I don’t know how long I’ve been among the Spirits. I don’t know anything. I’m quite a baby. Never mind. I don’t care. I’d rather be a baby. Hallo! Whoop! Hallo here!’ He was checked in his transports by the churches ringing out the lustiest peals he had ever heard. Clash, clang, hammer; ding, dong, bell. Bell, dong, ding; hammer, clang, clash! Oh, glorious, glorious!

“Running to the window, he opened it and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring, cold; cold, piping for the blood to dance to; Golden sunlight; Heavenly sky; sweet fresh air; merry bells. Oh, glorious. Glorious!

“‘What’s today?’ cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhaps had loitered in to look about him. ‘Eh?’ returned the boy, with all his might of wonder. ‘What’s today, my fine fellow?’ said Scrooge. ‘Today!’ replied the boy. ‘Why, CHRISTMAS DAY.’ ‘It’s Christmas Day!’ said Scrooge to himself. ‘I haven’t missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can.’”

Again, note the “childhood” theme in the account of Scrooge’s “conversion.” In the Gospel, Jesus said, “Unless you are converted and become as a little child, you will in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 18:3). Also, note the instantaneous nature, the crisis nature, or Scrooge’s “conversion.” “The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can.” This reminds me of a passage by Robert Browning in which he likens conversion to the effect of a lightning-flash in a dark night, suddenly showing up everything as clear as day. Here are Browning’s words:

“I stood at Naples once, a night so dark
I could have scarce conjectured there was earth
Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all:
But the night’s black was burst through by a blaze . . .
There lay the city thick and plain with spires,
And, like a ghost dishrouded, white the sea
So may the truth be flashed out by one blow.”

But back to Scrooge. A few minutes after the “crisis conversion” testimony, Dickens pictures the “continuing conversion” of the changed man. Christian conversion, also, has both aspects – the transforming crisis of the meeting with Christ, and the continuing change of a growing Christian life. Someone described these two aspects as the “revolutionary” conversion of a sinner, and the “evolutionary” (the continuing) conversion of the believer. Just after his transformation, Mr. Scrooge commissioned a boy to purchase “the prize Turkey” and deliver it to the Cratchit’s home. Dickens pictures Scrooge’s inner gratification in these words, “The chuckle with which he said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the Turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid for the cab, and the chuckle with which he recompensed the boy, were only to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again, and chuckled till he cried.” You must read the account for yourself to get “the rest of the story.”

Here, Dickens almost takes hold of the hem of God’s garment. Here is a small-scale mockup of Christian conversion. Of course, the conversion of a Christian is qualitatively different from any other change in life, and is wrought with more grace, love and *power* than even the most dramatic mere reformations. In fact, one of the deceits of

Satan is to lead church-related people to think that the reformation and civilization of sinners is the same as Christian conversion, but that is not true. The “conversion” of Scrooge only *suggests* the far greater wonder of Christian conversion, but it does suggest it wonderfully.

Any human being who has experienced the glorious power of God in true Christian conversion can see intimations of his own conversion in Scrooge’s transformation. The Bible says, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things have become new” (II Corinthians 5:17). Though many counterfeits travel under the name of Christian conversion and the new birth, the person who has genuinely experienced the total character transformation of the new birth knows the difference, and he can readily see in Scrooge’s transformation a small picture of his own conversion to Christ. I was easily reminded of my own glorious meeting with Christ in Dickens’ description of the transformation of Scrooge, though, of course, the author’s account was still poor in comparison.

In a great poem entitled *The Everlasting Mercy*, John Masefield describes Saul Kane, the drunken lout, foul of body and unclean of soul, making the great discovery of the fathomless love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. I easily locate myself and my sense of wonder over the love of Jesus and the miraculous (*wrought powerfully by God*) change which he wrought in me when I read Masefield’s words.

“I did not think, I did not strive, The deep peace burnt my me alive,
The bolted door had broken in, I knew that I had done with sin.
I knew that Christ had given me birth To brother all the souls of earth,
And every bird and every beast Should share the crumbs broken at the feast.

O glory of the lighted mind, How dead I’d been, how dumb, how blind!
The station brook, to my new eyes, Was babbling out of Paradise,
The waters rushing from the rain Were singing Christ has risen again.
I thought all earthly creatures knelt From rapture of the joy I felt.
The narrow station-wall’s brick ledge, The wild hop withering in the hedge,
The light in huntsman’s upper storey Were parts of an eternal glory,
Were God’s eternal garden flowers. I stood in bliss at this for hours.”

Remember that Scrooge’s character revolution only provides a silhouette of Christian conversion, but it kindles the spirit of a born-again reader.

Another likeness is that in true Christian conversion the transformed sinner is re-oriented from self to service. The inner “center of gravity” shifts from oneself to Christ and others. If it does not shift to *others*, it has not shifted to *Christ*. Every truly saved person is given a new compassion for all people the instant he is born again. Again, this is illustrated in Scrooge’s change.

“He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked

down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows, and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk – that anything – could give him so much happiness. In the afternoon he turned his steps toward his nephew’s house.” When he arrives there, he embraces the entire household in the arms of a changed man, and proves his transformation by doing the unthinkable – he raises Bob Cratchit’s salary!

Mark Guy Pearce once said, “A faith that will not deliver the ‘believer’ out of selfishness into service will not deliver him out of hell into heaven.”

I cannot leave the story without remarking that repentance is shown to be vital in producing the transformation, and that opportunity must be seized when the spiritual intrusion has occurred. In the throes of horror over his past life, Scrooge correctly says, “Men’s courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead. But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change.” This departure from the destructive course of sin is what the Bible calls “repentance.” Scrooge pled, as he fell upon his knees before the Spirit, “Good Spirit, your nature intercedes for me, and pities me. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life! I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will not shut out the lessons that the Spirits have taught. Oh, tell me that I may sponge away the writing on this stone!” And Scrooge “held up his hands in a last prayer to have his fate reversed.”

If I may replace the word “Spirit” with “the Holy Spirit,” and the word “Christmas” with “Christ,” and help you to realize that remorse and self-reformation are not the same as Christian conversion, we still can see conviction, contrition and conversion illustrated in the story.

Finally, let me remind you again that Mr. Dickens pictures the transformation of Scrooge as a *permanent* change, again a picture of true Christian conversion. A “*conversion to Christ*” that does not last is a counterfeit. There is no birth that does not last. A birth brings a new being into existence forever. With regard to some who professed Christ but did not possess Him – that is, the miracle of the new birth never occurred for them – the Apostle John wrote, “They went out from us, *but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not of us*” (I John 2:19). No mere professor should ever declare that he has “tried” Christianity and found nothing in it. In true Christianity, an individual does not “take” Christ, he is taken by Christ. Of course, his responsibility and his choice are implicated in the transaction, but the initiative belongs to God. The converted sinner is captured and conquered at that moment and forever by the glorious Son of God. He is radically transformed in a real and revolutionary *birth*, and the new nature he receives in that birth is his forever.

There is a mild illustration of this in the closing pages of the “Christmas Carol.” “Scrooge became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them;

for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset. His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him.” The closing paragraph of the story records these words: “And it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge.” So his change was not the mere resolution of a fleeting moment, but a settled course for the remainder of his life. Again, there are qualified similarities between the Scrooge story and the Gospel of Christ. Christian conversion is not a matter of human resolution at all; it is a matter of Divinely-wrought revolution within the character of a selfish sinner. When a person is saved, he is born *anowhen*, from above, and the one so born remains God’s child, with a privileged place in God’s family, the privileged subject of God’s infinite care, forever. Thus, he may legitimately join all of his brothers and sisters in saying, “God has blessed Us, Every One!”