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Divine Strategy in What is Positive

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"Fervent in spirit" ("The spiritual glow" - Moffatt) (Romans 12:11).

In the legend of Orpheus there is the incident when Orpheus sailed by the Island of the Siren and the Siren made such enchanting music that Orpheus had to lash his crew to the ship to keep them from rushing ashore and deserting him. Then he hit on another idea. With his lyre he made better music than the Siren and his crew lost all desire to leave the ship. The Siren was despised by comparison and no more trouble arose.

That is Greek legend, but there is an occasion in the Bible when in reality something happened of far greater importance. It is in the life of Hezekiah, the king of Israel (2 Chronicles, chapters 29, 30). Israel had been enticed away from Jehovah by other gods and were deeply involved in the worship of the idols of those false deities. So committed were they that neither appeal, entreaty, warning, nor threat on the part of the Prophets affected them. Things were in a bad state in Israel, but the people would not listen to God's messengers. Hezekiah was a man with a heart truly for the Lord. He decided to hold a feast of the Passover in Jerusalem. He sent an earnest invitation far and wide, and although they of Ephraim, Manasseh and Zebulun laughed the messengers to scorn, a great number responded and went up to the feast. It was such a time of life, joy and Divine blessing that the people voted to keep the feast for a further seven days. When this was concluded the people returned to the cities, towns, villages, and provinces. But as they went they saw the signs of their former spiritual declension, the idols of the false gods. So real was the work of grace in their hearts and their turning unto the Lord that they destroyed with zeal all these relics and swept them away. What all the warnings and entreaties had failed to do, one taste of the real thing accomplished in a short time. All the false was seen for its worthlessness in the light and experience of the real and true.

Many are the efforts, recourses, appeals, enticements, subtleties, attractions, and expense, being used to get people - especially young people - to come to the Lord, or to be more committed to Him than they are. Some respond; many do not. Some who respond turn back. Many who respond, because their response was based largely upon entertainment and pleasant attractions, require to have these incentives repeated and, should the glamour fade, they feel that the world has a better time than Christians do. Is this the only, or the best way?

In our own personal experience, and in our history in the Lord's work, we have known such a joy and satisfaction with the Lord and His life that all other incentives and interests have faded right out. The writer, as a young man, was one of a group of young people who hardly stopped to take a meal after their daily work so that they could get to a meeting, an opportunity for witnessing for the Lord, and Saturday was always looked forward to, not for sports and diversions, but because it brought a concerted action to go where sinners needed to know of their Saviour. Not in attractive and inviting conditions, but often in the slum houses and places of terrible filth and evil. In the Lord's work we have seen large numbers of young people gathered - *on public holidays* - for several days of intensive and solid conference gatherings, full of joy in the Lord. No other attractions or appeals than Christian fellowship and the ministry of the Word in an atmosphere of spiritual life. Coming from near and far, these hungry and committed numbers have rejoiced together like the Tribes of Israel going up to Jerusalem in olden times, singing the songs of Zion as they came and went.

We are not saying that there is little like that today; that would not be true, but we fear there is much more natural pleasure and worldly attraction than is necessary, or should be. If, in this day of frustrations, dissatisfaction, unrest, and casting off of restraint, people - especially young people - are going to be drawn to the Lord, we feel that the best and most effective way, and the way that will have the most solid results, will be the strategy of the positive; that is, by means of Christians who are so satisfied with the Lord, and to whom the Lord and His things mean so much, that their 'bill' is filled and they spontaneously convey that impression so that both the world and the 'Christian plus' feel that Christ is greater than all. It is not just exuberance; it is the deep waters of spiritual reality and Christly satisfaction.

The answer to the quest which lies behind words often sung:

*"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee",*

is not, first, in the turning down of idols, but in a taste of the true and real. The idols will go when we see the Lord.

This principle in Hezekiah's Feast, that all other and lesser things (in every connection) cease to be of any concern when that which is wholly of the Lord is seen and tasted, is the way of fullest joy, explains two things: one, why the Lord would provide the means for such experience. It is very important to the Lord's highest interests that there should be that which ministers to spiritual fulness; occasions when His injunction can be obeyed: "Gather my saints together unto me: those that have made a covenant with me by *sacrifice*" (Psalm. 50:5). Such means can be a very great power in the Lord's testimony in this world.

The other thing is that the curtailment, hindrance, discontinuance, or weakening of such means will be a primary object of the enemy of God's testimony. Have you noticed what immediately follows this great celebration, convocation and committal in the time of Hezekiah?

"After these things, and this faithfulness, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came... and encamped against..." (2 Chronicles 32).

The devil is always opposed to anything that results in a testimony to the all-sufficiency of the Lord to His people.