

Thoughts on *The Calvary Road*

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***The Calvary Road* by Roy Hession Copyright 1950, 2004 CLC Publications**

Background

The Calvary Road is a fairly short book that can be read in just a couple of hours. The ideas that it promotes, however, span centuries. The main teaching of *The Calvary Road* is that the Christian must empty himself of self, which includes all known sin. It is through the confession of sin and repentance that the Christian can remain in fellowship with God and live a victorious life.

This teaching may seem Biblical to most Christians, and it should since this is the predominant teaching in Pentecostal theology. Pentecostalism makes up a rather large portion of the Church, both in America and, increasingly, around the world. More Christians in America belong to Pentecostal denominations rather than Mainline denominations. What is interesting, however, is that even some of the Mainline denominations have sprung from the same root and, therefore, carry some of the same teachings.

Hession's theology, as taught in *The Calvary Road*, was largely borrowed from the Keswick teachings of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. To understand the Keswick teachings, it would be helpful to go back in history a bit.

As can be seen in the chart, one can trace the modern Pentecostal Movement all the way back to Pelagius, a 1600 year journey. This is not to say that Calvinism is dead, but it is clear that the Pelagian/Arminian/Wesleyan/Holiness theology has dominated. One may rightly argue that Arminianism is not all wrong. The problem is that the most extreme of the Arminian points remain intact in the Holiness and Keswick teachings. Hession's theology in *The Calvary Road* stems largely from such teachings. As we will see, Hession believes the Christian is capable of eradicating all known sin through confession and repentance. He believes that the Christian must empty himself before he can be filled with the Spirit through a "second blessing." The result is that he believes the Christian can lose his salvation and must "reapply the blood of Christ" to once again be restored to fellowship with God. Arminius believed that the man once given over to Christ could lose his salvation due to sin. Arminianists must continually strive to maintain holiness else they will lose their salvation. God's grace is applied only in the sense that He restores the sinner after the sinner does his work of confession and repentance.

Out of Keswick in England and the Holiness Movement in America came the modern idea of a "second blessing" as a means to a "deeper life," or "victorious life." The second blessing doctrine came from John Wesley and John Fletcher, but those in Keswick, and those Wesleyans in America who ignited the Holiness Movement, took Wesley's brand of Arminianism a step further. Most Christians would question why a deeper or victorious life should not be desired and pursued. Going deeper with Jesus sounds like a great thing, as does living a victorious life. So, what's wrong with the "deeper life" teaching?

The New Testament does not teach that the Christian is to receive a "second blessing." Indeed, the apostle Paul states in Ephesians 4:5 that there is "...one Lord, one faith, one baptism..." Wesley, in the 18th century, was the first one to propose such a "second blessing." Fletcher was the first one to use the term "baptism of the Holy Spirit." Wesley and Fletcher taught that the Christian cannot be victorious in achieving "Christian perfection" until, and unless, he receives such a blessing. Wesley taught that the Christian is justified upon first receiving the Lord, but is not sanctified until he receives the second blessing. He believed that the Christian can attain a certain "perfection" on earth by continually confessing and repenting of all known sin. He admitted that no one could ever be free from all sin since some sin would remain unknown to the believer. Nevertheless, Wesley's ideas travelled with him to America, and from his theology, the Holiness Movement of the 19th century was born.

From Catholicism to the Pentecostal Movement

Early 5th century

Pelagius - No original sin - man not completely without goodness
Semi-Pelagianism - Original sin - grace necessary, but effectiveness depends on man's will, even for salvation

Augustine - Original sin - man completely depraved - grace necessary for salvation, but man's will cooperates with grace after salvation

Catholicism, over the centuries, adopts more of a Pelagian view, in that man is justified as much by his works as by God's grace

Early 16th century

Reformers kept much of Catholic doctrine but differed primarily in regard to grace and free will

Luther - Man completely depraved, cannot be justified or sanctified by works but by grace

Mid 16th century

Council of Trent - Responds to the Reformers by reaffirming justification by God's grace, but with the cooperation of man's will, in addition to sanctification by man's works in cooperation with God's grace

1509 - 1564

Calvin - Total depravity of man, no free will, God chose who would be saved, man cannot resist the calling of the Holy Spirit, cannot lose one's salvation

1560 - 1609

Arminius - Some bit of goodness in man, man has free will to seek God, God knew beforehand who would respond, man chooses whether to follow calling of the Holy Spirit, must endeavor to sustain one's salvation

18th century

Wesley - The Christian must attain to "perfection," such that he comes to a place of never willfully sinning.

Fletcher - The Christian is able to attain to "perfection" by receiving a "second blessing" or "baptism of the Holy Spirit."

1792 - 1875

Finney - Promotes New School theology - The Christian must live a holy, perfect life in accord with moral law. When the Christian sins, he is in a state of condemnation and has lost his salvation until he confesses and repents. Revival begins with "second blessing" or "baptism of the Holy Spirit."

Mid 19th century

Holiness Movement - American Methodists go beyond Wesley's Arminianism and form splinter groups. Christians must attain to "perfection" and they prove their holiness through emotional manifestations said to be evidence of the "baptism of the Holy Spirit." Justification begins at salvation, sanctification begins only upon the "second blessing." However, one is never sure of justification since he cannot know if he has attained to "entire sanctification" until his death.

Late 19th century

Keswick Movement - British "holiness movement." More Calvinistic than American Holiness Movement, but the focus is still on confession, repentance, and loss of fellowship with God. Doctrine of "counteraction" says that the Spirit dispels the darkness of sin. If the Christian sins, the power of the Spirit disappears. Believer must counteract sin by faith. The self is worthless. We must come to a crisis whereby we hate ourselves and empty ourselves so that God can fill us. This is the "second blessing." The self cannot be transformed. The self is separate from the nature that has accepted Christ. The believer must abandon self and this abandonment is solely the work of the believer. Peace and joy arise from victory over all known sin. Holiness is freedom from sin rather than conformity to God's character.

Early 20th century

Pentecostal Movement - Borrowed from both the Holiness Movement and Keswick. Evidence of holiness through emotional manifestation and speaking in tongues. Most denominations today deny the loss of salvation. Sanctification is proven by a separate "baptism of the Holy Spirit." This baptism produces an inner cleansing and power for victory over sin. Strong emphasis on confession and repentance

Wesley's Arminianism found wide acceptance in America. Calvinism was on the decline and Charles Finney's fiery ministry took Arminianism to its extreme. The rationalism of the Enlightenment was in full force, paving the way for the teachings of Wesley and Finney. Wesley questioned his early Christian life, saying that he believed he was not saved even though he believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. It was not until he came to his "crisis" and received the "second blessing" that he believed he was truly saved. Finney, however, would go much further. Finney believed that the Christian has no assurance of salvation. He taught that the believer loses his salvation every time he sins. The teachings of Wesley and Finney took hold in the American Holiness Movement of the 19th century. It was this movement from which the modern Pentecostal Movement sprang in the early 20th century.

Something else was taking place in England at the same time. In the lake region community of Keswick, some local teachers were promoting their own brand of Holiness. The first meeting took place in 1875. By the time Roy Hession got there, it had been flourishing for decades. Apart from his association with Keswick, Hession says that he was searching for a renewal of the power of the Spirit in his life when he heard the testimonies of some missionaries who had come to England from Rwanda. He was struck by the testimonies and realized that he was lacking something. That was 1947. In 1950, he published *The Calvary Road*, a collection of articles he had written over the course of a few years.

CLC Publications

CLC Publications is the publishing arm of CLC Ministries International. CLC Publications is dedicated to promoting the "Deeper Life" theology. Their authors include:

Charles Finney, who did not believe that Christ's sacrifice on the cross atoned for anyone's sin but His own;

Watchman Nee, who was taught the Keswick concept of a second blessing, who believed in a "partial rapture," who studied the mystic writings of Jesse Penn-Lewis and Madame Guyon, and who believed that God's written word was not real unless it was spoken;

Andrew Murray, another Keswick participant;

Norman Grubb, yet another Keswick attendee whose Worldwide Evangelization Crusade formally aligned with CLC in 1941, who later studied William James and subsequently doubted the existence of God, who later would say (concerning his attempt to regain faith), "...I have to make a deliberate choice, a leap into the dark," and who wrote the forward to Hession's *The Calvary Road*;

and many others. Hession, as can be seen, is a good fit, having the Keswick connection and, generally, an Arminian stance.

The Deeper Life of Keswick

If you have studied the Word of Faith Movement or, as it is simply called, the Faith Movement, you understand that the definition of a word can make all the difference. Any Christian would tell you that faith is a good thing and we need more of it. So, why not jump into the Faith Movement? But when we see that the Faith Movement defines "faith" as "a force in the universe" that is to be used to move God (for He is subject to His own universal laws), we see how dangerous such a movement can be. Likewise, when we understand from where the deeper life teaching comes and where it leads, we may well declare that it, too, is dangerous.

Let's look at Hession's own words from *The Calvary Road*.

Preface to the 1973 edition:

In Dr. Hession's preface to the 1973 edition, he says that, through revival, believers are coming to experience "...the power of the blood of Jesus to cleanse *fully* from sin..." (emphasis added). As will be seen, this is the primary focus of *The Calvary Road*. Hession, like his Holiness and Keswick colleagues, have been teaching that

the blood of Christ only covers sin insofar as the believer confesses all known sin. The implication is that any unconfessed sin is not covered by the blood sacrifice.

Hession recounts a “dry” period in his life from which he said he discovered what he “had to do to be revived and filled with the Spirit.” Hession asserts that the believer must come to a “crisis” in his life, whereby he finally realizes that he must be “filled with the Spirit.” This is the equivalent of the “second blessing” taught by Wesley and Fletcher, the Holiness teachers in America, and the Keswick teachers in England. These teachers all believe that the new Christian receives a first baptism of the Spirit upon salvation, but cannot mature in the Lord or operate in the power of the Spirit until he receives the second blessing or “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” Hession, however, must believe that the Christian may need a third baptism or “filling of the Spirit” since he does admit he once had preached in the power of the Spirit (a second blessing) and then lost it.

What is remarkable is that Hession’s main teachings in this book had been taught for some 75 years at the Keswick meetings. Nowhere in the book does Hession mention Keswick. He does say that his “word pictures” and metaphors come from the African “revival,” yet he fails to say that his theology is not his at all. His brokenness/confession/repentance theology is the main teaching from Keswick.

In this 1973 preface to *The Calvary Road*, Hession reiterates his main themes: The Christian must continually confess all known sin if he is to maintain his salvation, and the blood of Christ covers only those sins that have been confessed. These are the main points of the Keswick teachers. Hession believes that the Christian must empty himself of self. This is another of the main points of the Keswick teachers. As we move through the book, these teachings will be explained in more detail.

One other point to note: In the preface, Hession references Psalm 102:13 and Nehemiah 2:13 in relation to Christian revival and his vision for the Church. Clearly, he has taken these Scripture verses out of context, as they pertain to the nation of Israel and the Jewish people. Hession continues to use verses out of context throughout the book. However, it should also be noted that Hession makes reference to very few verses. In fact, he fails to give Biblical proof to support his major points of teaching.

Chapter 1: Brokenness

Hession correctly states that, “If...we are to come into...right relationship with Him, the first thing we must learn is that our wills must be broken to His will.” In fact, no one can be saved unless, and until, he admits that he is wrong and God is right. That is the beginning of relationship with God. We come to a place of humility, often through many trials and tribulations as the result of our own will, and we submit to God’s will. However, we must understand that, at this point, we may have very little understanding of what it means to be a Christian. When we come to salvation, we have bowed our hearts enough to know that we need God. We may not know any more than that. We admit that we have been wrong in our thinking about God and that is brokenness. But that admission is also confession of sin and repentance.

Upon confession of sin, God brings us into right relationship with Him. 1 John 1:9 tells us that when we agree with God that we are wrong and He is right, “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We are clean. Romans 8:1 says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” Paul goes on to explain that “...He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit...But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you....And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of [His] righteousness” (Romans 8:3-4,9-10). We receive the Spirit when we are saved and He dwells in us, not because of our righteousness, but because of His grace.

Now, if we receive the Spirit by His grace, we must continue to walk in His grace and not our works. Romans 6:4 says, “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life.” How is it that we walk in newness of life? As we will see, Hession would say we cannot walk in newness unless we are continually confessing and repenting of all known sin, his definition of “brokenness.” But does the New Testament teach this? The apostle Paul says, “For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the

likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin....For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace” (Romans 8:5-7,14). Paul does caution that God’s grace is no excuse for our continuing sin, but does he teach that our state of brokenness is dependent upon continual confession and repentance?

Hession goes on to say that “self” gets in the way of continued brokenness. This is a major point of teaching from the Keswick Movement. Hession and the Keswick teachers say that we maintain brokenness by emptying ourselves of self. We empty ourselves through continued confession. While it is true that our “self” is selfish and willful, do any of the New Testament authors teach us to empty ourselves of self?

First, what does Hession mean by self? If he means “soul,” his teaching is not Biblical, for the Lord desires to save our souls. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 says, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.” Notice the promise: It is God who sanctifies and preserves, not us. He is faithful. And He has saved our souls. Hebrews 10:39 says, “But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.” Again, God saves souls; He does not ask us to empty them.

If by “self” Hession is referring to the flesh, he again is not presenting a Biblical concept. The flesh is corrupt. We cannot fix the flesh. Yet, the Bible does not say that the flesh is to be “emptied.” Paul’s oft-quoted words to the Romans explains: “For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do....But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find....But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (7:15,17-18,23-25).

Paul says that the transformed mind wills to follow God, but the flesh continues to war against the new man. The flesh is always warring. It is not emptied. Certainly, if Paul had found a formula that could empty the flesh, he would have told us. Yet, we find no such instruction, not even the teaching of confession and repentance. Paul says that he can find no way to do what is good. He cannot, of himself, destroy the flesh; yet, he does not say that the answer is to empty the self. Instead, he asks the question: “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Who will rescue me from the law of death that reigns in my flesh? He answers himself: “...through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Jesus has already finished the work.

Part of the fruit of the Spirit is “self-control.” We have a self and it is the Spirit who produces fruit whereby we are self-controlled. Again, the Spirit does not empty the self. Indeed, there are several instances in which the apostles teach believers to exercise self-control (e.g., 1 Corinthians 7:5-9, 2 Peter 1:6). The self is not to be emptied, but is to be subjected to the mind, which is being transformed by the Holy Spirit; thus, self-control is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Romans 12:2, Galatians 5:23).

Emptying the self is the first step in the Keswick teachings. But we must ask ourselves why God would want to create human beings with personalities, with individual souls, then come to earth to save such individuals, but then demand that each individual give up that self that was so precious saved. Are we to imagine that Adam and Eve had no human “self,” no unique personalities? Indeed, Hession lists such personality traits as “shy” as being a sin that must be emptied. Without “self,” humans are no longer “human,” but mere automatons. Certainly, if we are created in the image of God, we cannot be automatons. We know that Jesus had a “self,” a personality, that was uniquely His as a man. Although He obeyed the Father in all things, He still had a self.

Hession, as all humans do, seeks to find a way, a formula, by which he can please God, but he keeps coming back to this idea of brokenness by way of emptiness through confession. While it sounds Biblical, a close inspection of the word of God will show that it is yet another attempt to be justified by works.

Chapter 2: Cups Running Over

Hession begins the chapter by saying that brokenness is only the beginning. He says that we must be “filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit.” He even asks the question, “If we were asked this moment if we were filled with the Holy Spirit, how many of us would dare to answer ‘yes’?” What is implied here, of course, is that not many of us could honestly answer ‘yes’. So, now we have the question: What is the “filling of the Holy Spirit?”

Hession, as do the other Holiness and Keswick teachers, believes that the Christian receives the Holy Spirit upon salvation, but then must receive a “filling of the Holy Spirit” or “baptism of the Holy Spirit” for sanctification. Hession also teaches that we must continue to receive a filling of the Holy Spirit. We do this by “present[ing] our empty, broken self and let[ting] Him fill and keep filled.”

There are two questions here: One, is there a second baptism of the Holy Spirit; and two, if so, can we receive it by emptying ourselves? We have already answered the second question. We saw that emptying the self is not a Biblical teaching. Rather, Christ becomes our righteousness and saves our soul. The indwelling Holy Spirit transforms our mind and produces fruit through us, that God may be glorified. If we look to examples in the New Testament, we do not see anywhere where a new believer first empties himself before receiving salvation. Repentance is required, but repentance is simply admitting that our perception of God was wrong and that we need Jesus for salvation. There is, however, no emptying of the self, through confession of sins or otherwise.

To answer the first question, we go to the words of Paul to the Church at Ephesus: There is “...one Lord, one faith, one baptism...” (4:5). What does he mean by one baptism? Before Jesus came and saved us, John baptized with water and he said, referring to Jesus, that He would baptize with the Holy Spirit. This is the baptism to which Paul refers. In Acts, there are references to people who had believed in Jesus but were not yet baptized with the Holy Spirit. This simply refers to the fact that we can believe intellectually in the fact of Jesus’ coming, but may not yet be saved. Certainly, the word went out that a prophet had come and was crucified. Many had heard the news, but they did not necessarily submit to the Lordship of Christ. It is upon submission that we are saved, for we cannot receive salvation apart from a humble heart. It is then, upon salvation, that the Holy Spirit indwells the believer. But is there another baptism of the Spirit?

Many point to Acts 2 and other passages in Acts for proof, but Acts 2 must be noted as a special passage. This was the beginning of the Church. Here, we see the apostles and other disciples gathered together in obedience. Just as the Old Testament saints, these saints were “saved” by faith, for their “faith was accounted unto them as righteousness.” Just as the Old Testament saints, these saints did not have the indwelling Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, the Spirit came and went upon those whom God chose. In the New Testament, prior to Pentecost, the same was true. Then, at Pentecost, in fulfillment of the Old Testament Feast of Weeks, the Holy Spirit came to the believers on a permanent basis. At that point, the Church came into existence, and from then on, the indwelling Holy Spirit has been the mark of salvation.

A careful study of Paul’s epistles, which reveal the mystery of the Body of Christ, which is the Church, will show that our baptism unto Christ’s death and resurrection is the only baptism. Upon this sincere confession of faith, the new believer receives the Holy Spirit. There is no mention of a second blessing or second baptism.

Hession goes on to describe this “filling of the Spirit” as water in a cup. “As [Jesus] passes by He looks into our cup, and if it is clean, He fills it to overflowing with the Water of Life.” There are a couple of problems here. First, if Hession is referring to the point of salvation, can anyone be saved? Second, if he is referring only to “sanctification,” are the clean cups our doing or God’s doing?

First, if Hession is referring to having clean cups as a necessity to receive the Holy Spirit, then no one can be saved. Indeed, if we could have clean cups apart from the Holy Spirit, Christ died in vain. No one is clean apart from the imputed righteousness of Christ. We cannot receive His righteousness apart from confession and repentance. But that confession and repentance refers to our initial humility at the point of salvation, which itself is by God’s grace (Ephesians 2:4-9). We confess our sin, the sin that we believe we do not need God, and upon that confession, we are forgiven and cleansed. That confession of sin is repentance. If repentance involved behavior, no one could be saved, for no one, apart from the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, can cease from any

sinning. And as we have seen already, Paul continued to struggle, his flesh warring with his spirit.

Repentance is the act of reconsidering one's thoughts about God (2 Corinthians 7:10, 2 Timothy 2:23-26). It has nothing to do with external behavior. The repentance itself is given by God (Acts 11:18, 2 Timothy 2:25) and it is by the grace of God that we can confess; that is, we agree with Him that we were in opposition to Him. When we repent and confess, in true humility, we receive the Holy Spirit and we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. It is His righteousness, not ours. He forgives us and cleanses us of all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). We are made clean, positionally, in Him through the baptism of the Spirit. Yet, as Peter tells us, this baptism is "not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God" (1 Peter 3:21). This is the opposite of what Hession is teaching.

Hession teaches that we must clean our cups, that is, "remove the filth of the flesh" by emptying the self, before the Spirit can fill us. If Hession is referring to the point of salvation, he is in opposition to the Bible. Second, if Hession is referring to ongoing sanctification, he is again in opposition. Hession would have us continually empty ourselves and confess all known sin in order to continually clean our cup. As we have seen, neither the cleaning of the cup, nor our own work in such a cleansing, is Biblical.

As we saw earlier in Romans 7:23-25, Paul asks the question, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" He answers by saying, "...through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Then the question is this: How? What does he mean by "through Jesus Christ?" How does that work?

In Romans 13:14, he says, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh..." To "put on" means to "clothe," in the sense of "sinking into a garment." What we need to understand is that He has clothed us in His righteousness. There is nothing we can do, of ourselves, to be righteous. It is His work, by His grace. We receive His clothing of righteousness by faith.

Galatians 3:27 says, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." We have already put on Christ if we are saved. So now, we walk in His righteousness, not ours. So then, having received the righteousness of Christ by faith, we must continue to walk in such faith. Paul asks the Galatians, who wanted to return to the law, "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" (3:2-3)

We are made righteous by Christ, and that by faith, "...that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God -- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption..." (1 Corinthians 1:29-30). Hession and the other Holiness teachers would have us work for our own sanctification, albeit through a "second blessing," but it is precisely the filling of the Holy Spirit upon salvation that assures us of sanctification. Paul says, "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth..." (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Sanctification is the work of the Spirit.

Hession says, point blank, "The Lord Jesus does not fill dirty cups." By implication, then, no one can be saved. If, however, Hession would allow the unbeliever to be saved, he certainly would say that the new believer needs to work for his sanctification, always holding out his cup. If the cup is dirty it must be cleaned. To Hession's credit, he does say it is the work of Jesus to clean the cup, although, as we have seen, it is the work of the Spirit, but acknowledging that it is God's work and not ours is a step in the right direction. What Hession does not understand is that we are already made clean, positionally, and that ongoing sanctification is not our work, but that of the Spirit. Sanctification is not a cleansing in the sense of salvation, as Hession seems to believe. The believer is clean and his salvation is sure. Sanctification is the Spirit's work in us of which we are usually unaware.

If we are to understand Hession, we come to the conclusion that Christ's cleansing is either not good enough to cleanse from all sin, or it is not strong enough to last beyond some point in time. According to Hession's teaching, that point in time would be the moment the new believer sins. That wouldn't be long!

Then, of course, if -- upon sinning -- the believer is unclean and needs to have Jesus reapply the cleansing blood,

it is implied that that believer is no longer saved, for a person cannot enter heaven unless he has been cleansed in the blood of Christ and made righteous. This being the case, we can trace Hession's theology back to Keswick and to the Holiness Movement. Finney, who popularized the Holiness teaching, was a staunch Pelagian/Arminian (although he had a heretical theology all his own!) who taught that the Christian loses his salvation upon sinning and is subject to condemnation: In his Systemic Theology, he writes, "The Christian...is justified no longer than he obeys, and must be condemned when he disobeys...In these respects, then, the sinning Christian and the unconverted sinner are upon precisely the same ground." Hession's theology may not be so bluntly stated, but the result is the same: Dirty cups, which are caused by sinning, are not covered under the atoning blood of Christ; hence, the sinner is condemned and no longer justified. It is up to the sinner to hold out his dirty cup and have it cleansed once again.

Chapter 3: The Way of Fellowship

In this chapter, Hession rightly points out that when we are brought into right relationship with God, we are also brought into right relationship with fellow believers. We must love one another. But then Hession interprets that to mean that we must reveal our sins to one another, that just as we must continually confess our sins to God if we are to remain in fellowship with Him, we must also confess our sins to other believers if we are to remain in fellowship with them.

Hession uses 1 John 1:7 as a reference: "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another..." Hession reasons that the "light" is the revealing of sins and the "darkness" is the hiding of sins. From this interpretation, Hession teaches that each believer must live in the light, not only with God, but with each other. Since the light reveals sin, we cannot truly be in the light if we are not revealing our sins to others.

A proper understanding of the context of 1 John is in order. The apostle wrote this letter to the Church that was dealing with the heresy of Gnosticism. The Gnostics believed that Jesus came, that He died on a cross, and was resurrected. However, they were not true believers. They were not in the light because they failed to believe the whole truth, namely, that Jesus was both God and man, God in the flesh and not merely a spirit. Because of this doctrinal error, the Gnostics were still walking in darkness. "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all," (1 John 1:5); therefore, the Christian must believe Him completely, and not in part. Christians can have true fellowship only with those who believe that Jesus came in the flesh. John was informing the Gnostics that they could not claim to know God but continue to walk in the darkness of doctrinal error concerning His Son.

This doctrinal error is the foundation for the entire letter; the letter cannot be properly understood apart from this foundation. Hession misunderstands the letter from the beginning and fails to demonstrate how his interpretation would flow throughout the letter. He has taken the verse out of context and, in so doing, writes an entire chapter expounding on the necessity of believers to confess all known sin to God and most, if not all, sins to fellow believers. There is no Scriptural basis for such teaching.

The only verse in all of the New Testament that says someone should confess his sins to someone else comes in James chapter 5. Again, we must look at the verse in context. In this passage (14-20), James is referring to those who are sick or weak in some way. It is the elders of the Church who are to tend to the one who needs help. By elders, James is referring to those who are recognized as being mature in the Lord (Titus 1:5-9). By their prayers, the sick will be restored to health. Then James says that we should confess our faults to one another that we may be healed. It is implied from the context that it is the sick or weak who should confess that he may receive prayer and healing. And if anyone "wanders from the truth," we should make the effort to show him the error of his ways. It is implied that the elders are primarily responsible for teaching of doctrine that would show the truth to the wandering soul. In this entire passage, it is understood that confession of sins is primarily between elders and the sick and/or wandering.

Even if we do interpret this passage in James as one that teaches the confession of sins among all believers, we still must acknowledge that this confession is within the context of sickness and healing. This is not to say that the believer should not be transparent with fellow believers. Indeed, we should have close relationships in which the Lord may prompt us to open up. However, Hession's teaching that we cannot be in right relationship with God if we are not continually confessing sin to Him and others is not Biblical.

Nevertheless, in continuing on in this chapter, we should examine the implication of Hession's teaching. He says, "Everything that the light of God shows up as sin we can confess and carry to the Fountain of Blood and it is gone, gone from God's sight and gone from our hearts." Here, Hession continues with his idea that the Christian must confess all known sin if he is to remain cleansed and in right relationship with God. That begs the question: If the Christian does not confess a particular revealed sin before he dies, will he go to heaven or hell? The clear implication of Hession's teaching is that the unconfessed sin, being not cleansed by the blood, renders the soul unclean and out of fellowship with God, not fit for heaven. Our salvation depends on the atoning, cleansing blood sacrifice of Christ. His blood "cleanses us from all unrighteousness," according to 1 John 1:9, but according to Hession, His blood cleanses us only from known and confessed unrighteousness.

Chapter 4: The Highway of Holiness

Hession explains that this chapter is a sort of summary of what he has taught so far, only he wishes now to present his theology in "picture form." He begins his picture by going to the Old Testament, Isaiah 35, and the prophecy of the Highway of Holiness.

Hession says that "the Highway is narrow and uphill," yet this is nowhere to be found in the passage. Undoubtedly, Hession would like us to picture the path of salvation as strenuous. Yet, he confesses that "it is not beyond any of us to walk it..." In saying this, he references the passage: "Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray." The passage has already informed us that "the unclean shall not pass over it...[and] the redeemed shall walk there..." Clearly, this is the path of salvation, and Hession admits, in quoting the passage, that whoever is worthy to walk the road "shall not go astray." The Hebrew meaning here is that the redeemed cannot err and cannot wander away.

Yet, Hession then makes a remarkable statement: "The unclean shall not pass over it.' This includes not only the sinner who does not know Christ as his Saviour, but the Christian who does and yet is walking in unconfessed and uncleansed sin." First, Hession admits that the redeemed walk the road and cannot go astray, but then says the Christian with unconfessed sin is unclean and cannot walk the road. Hession's teaching here is completely contradictory. Again, we see here that Hession believes the Christian loses his salvation upon sinning, even though the verse he chose says that the redeemed, once on the Highway, "cannot err."

Hession continues on with his word picture, telling us that there is a door that he calls the Door of the Broken Ones. If anyone is to be able to enter the Highway, he must first go through this Door. This entrance requires complete and total brokenness, such that the one seeking entrance must "[be] nothing." This is equivalent to the process of emptying oneself of self that was presented earlier. Again, we must ask where this prerequisite for salvation exists in the Church age.

In Acts 2, after the receiving of the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room, the disciples were seen and heard by many people. These people wanted to know what was happening. Peter spoke up. After he was done with his message, the unconverted hearers were shaken, their hearts were pierced. They asked what they should do. Peter said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38). We see here that the hearers were struck by the word of God. Peter then tells them to repent; that is, to change their minds about what they had previously thought about Jesus and accept this message about salvation through Him. These new believers received the Holy Spirit without having to go through some emptying formula in which they confessed all known sin. Peter does not say a word about confessing all known sin.

Hession goes on, "As we bend to crawl through [the Door], the blood cleanses from all sin." It is good to hear him say this, and we may think he understands the atoning blood of Christ, but then he goes on to say, "...[M]aybe you have known [Jesus] for years, but...you are defiled by sin, the sins of pride, envy, resentment, impurity, etc." Once again, Hession says that the blood of Christ is of no value unless it is applied "piecemeal" as the sinner confesses his transgressions one by one. Even though you may know Jesus, you are not saved because you are defiled by sin.

What is the solution? Hession explains, "If you will give them all [all your sins] to Him who bore them on the cross, He will whisper to you again what He once said on the cross, 'It is finished,' and your heart will be cleansed whiter than snow." The question now is, if He bore all your sins on the cross but you are still defiled by them, why did He bear them? Of what use was His sacrifice? And if He said, "It is finished," but it really was not finished, is He a liar? Now we see the error of Pelagius as it weaves its way through Roman Catholicism, onto Arminius, and down to the Holiness teachers. Romanism teaches that Christ is still on the cross, having to continually bear our sins as we continually confess. If it is not finished, our salvation is not sure, and whatever salvation we may obtain will be by our own works of sanctification. Christ is crucified over again with each application of cleansing blood.

Hession then contradicts himself when he says that as we walk the Highway we can look back and see that the cross is empty and Jesus is walking the Highway with us. First, he keeps Jesus on the cross by saying that Jesus must repeatedly tell us it is finished as we confess each sin on a daily basis. Now he is saying that Jesus is no longer on the cross, but on the Highway. Indeed, elsewhere in the book, and on many occasions, Hession says that we must continually go back to the foot of the cross to apply the blood.

Continuing on in the word picture, we see that Jesus is carrying a "pitcher with the Water of Life. He...asks us to hold out our hearts....He looks inside...and where He sees we have allowed His blood to cleanse them, He fills them with the Water of Life." In this picture, the Water of Life is the Holy Spirit and the object is to be filled to overflowing with the Spirit. This is defined as victorious living. First, Jesus does not carry the Holy Spirit. The Spirit comes from the Father and is sent to all who believe the Gospel (John 14:26, 15:26). Second, the believers are already filled with the Spirit upon salvation. Third, as we have seen before, His blood has already cleansed the sin of the believer.

Hession explains that the believer slips off or wanders off the Highway for any number of reasons. Whatever the reason, he can look back to the Highway and see Jesus waiting to cleanse his dirty cup.

As the chapter continues, it becomes more clear why Hession clings to such a theology. He explains that other people walk the Highway with us and that sometimes they will irritate us. Our reaction is sinful. Others may sin against us, but we are to have a godly reaction; anything else is sin. Hession says, "'God is love,' that is, love for others, and the moment we fail in love towards another, we put ourselves out of fellowship with God -- for God loves him even if we don't." Hession can clearly see that even though the other person has sinned, God loves him; yet Hession does not seem to understand God's love for him (Hession). God's love is unconditional. Our sin does not stop God from loving us. God loves even the unconverted soul, so how much more the one who trusts His Son for salvation by faith through His grace? We cannot earn salvation any more than we can earn God's love. Both are by His grace.

Chapter 5: The Dove and the Lamb

In this chapter, Hession writes about the submissive and humble nature of God as manifested in the Son and the Holy Spirit. He writes about the dove being the symbol of the Holy Spirit, but he keeps referring to the dove as a "she," while he acknowledges that the Holy Spirit is a "he." It's a bit odd.

His main point in this chapter is that the dove and the lamb are both symbols of humility; thus, "the heart of Deity is humility." If this is true, Hession reasons, then the dove cannot continue to rest on those who are not humble. He says, "How impossible that He should rest upon us while self is unbroken!...[T]he Holy Spirit will only come upon us and remain upon us as we are willing to be as the Lamb on each point on which He will convict us." Once again, we see that the Christian loses the Spirit, and his salvation, each time he sins, for the dove cannot remain on the unbroken, unclean sinner.

Hession says that "the sign of the Spirit's presence and fullness will be peace. This is indeed to be the test of our walk all the way along...If the Dove ceases to sing in our hearts at any time, if our peace is broken, then it can only be because of sin." Here, we see that it is our sin that forces the dove to "fly away," as Hession puts it. When that happens, when the Spirit leaves us, peace leaves our hearts, and this is how we know that we have lost fellowship with God.

But Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." You see, we have peace because we are justified, not because we do not sin. Ephesians 2:14 says that, "...He Himself is our peace..." Granted, sometimes we feel uneasy about something in our lives. We may describe this as a lack of peace. Hession would tell us if we have this lack of peace, the Holy Spirit has left. Just the opposite is true! That uneasy feeling IS the Holy Spirit. He hasn't left, He has spoken to our heart! Sometimes, the uneasy feeling is due to sin, but that is not lack of peace with the loss of the Spirit; it is, rather, the conviction of the Spirit, leading us to see where we are. Sometimes that uneasy feeling is due to a decision that must be made, but that is not lack of peace, it is discernment given by the Spirit. In either case, we do not lose the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is our guide who leads us to the truth. If He left us every time we sinned, we would have no guide to lead us. This is perhaps the most dangerous of Hession's teachings. In his Highway analogy, he says that when the believer sins, he falls off the Highway and the Spirit leaves. If the Spirit is gone, who is leading him back to the Highway? Not Jesus. He is on the Highway waiting for the sinner to come back, but He is not pictured as going after the fallen. Instead, Jesus is on the Highway with the Water of Life. If we are to follow this word picture to its conclusion, we see that Jesus is carrying the Spirit (which we saw is not Biblical) and the Spirit is not with the fallen, for He has flown away.

The Holy Spirit is given to us to teach us. If we cannot count on Him to be there in our biggest struggles, what kind of teacher is He? Who is this God who leaves every time we make the smallest of mistakes?

Conclusions

This covers the first five chapters of *The Calvary Road*. The final five chapters continue on in the same such theology and we will not go into them in detail here. We will leave you with this:

Colossians 2:6-14 says, "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him [How did we receive Him? By faith, not by works; by His grace which was freely given to us], rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit [Could Hession's theology be mere moral philosophy?], according to the tradition of men [e.g., Romanism], according to the basic principles of the world [salvation by works], and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete [replete, crammed, furnished, satisfied, finished, filled up] in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ [It is His work, not ours, and it has already been done], buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses [all sins], having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us [the law with all its sacrificial requirements for the remission of sins], which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."

The work has already been done. All that is left is for us to walk in it, by faith, by His grace. It is the tendency of man to want to earn his way and we worry that if we preach grace, others will take advantage of it. Many have and will continue to do so, but just because some people abuse God's grace and mercy is no reason to throw out the doctrine. We often make it so difficult for people to come to Christ by requiring them to confess all sin and empty themselves. But that is not the Gospel. And then when people get saved, we pile up rules they must follow rather than allow the Holy Spirit to lead them. Let us rather encourage people to walk with Jesus, to know who they are in Christ, to have confidence in their relationship with Him. This is quite easily done without resorting to a formula or set of rules. And then we are to trust Him to change their hearts even as He is changing ours. Let us keep our eyes focused on Jesus rather than our flesh. As long as we are looking at Him, He'll take care of the rest.

And if we are going to continue to look at Him, where are we to look? Hession would have us go back to the cross. There is no denying that we must ever be humbled by the cross. The cross paid the penalty for our sin. Because of the cross, we can have fellowship with God. Hession and so many others are content to struggle with

earthly perfection, trying to earn salvation over and over again by keeping Christ on the cross. Yet, Paul did not. We would challenge you to find anywhere where Paul questioned his salvation or God's love for him following his conversion.

Paul saw the cross, maybe not physically, but spiritually. The Lord showed him the sacrifice. Paul understood that he was purchased for a price. Yet, Paul does not speak of the cross as an ongoing event and he does not teach that believers are to keep going back to the cross. Instead, he shows us that the work done on the cross is finished and we can have confidence in Christ. Because of the cross, we can move forward in God's perfect love. That is where we find victorious living!

Hession does not teach the resurrection. This is not to say that he does not believe it to be true, but he does not include the whole Gospel in his theology. He mentions in passing the wonderful news that Christ was resurrected, but he never looks to it to inform his theology. The bulk of the New Testament writings directed to the Church concern daily living. In each of these passages, the writer either refers to the cross, the resurrection, or the return of Christ. In the instances in which we are directed to the cross, it is always past tense, the work having been completed. The cross is a point of reference from which we draw our confidence, but we are never told to go back to the cross to reapply the blood or cleanse ourselves. And often we are directed to turn our attention to the resurrection and the second coming as a source of encouragement.

It is understood that Hession and the other Holiness teachers were seeking a closer relationship with God. There is nothing wrong with that. We should all be so concerned about our relationship with God. However, the approach that Hession and others take is not Biblical. There is a danger in trying to attain holiness through emptiness and confession. Such an approach obscures the believer from his right standing with God. The believer who tries to please God through emptiness and confession does not know who he is in Christ. He has lost sight of the fact of justification and imputed righteousness. He has lost sight of the promises of God to those who have been justified by faith. And when we look constantly to our own flesh, we lose sight of our purpose.

God is calling His Church. He is adding to it daily. That is the ongoing work in the Church age. God uses people to build His Church, but if we are so consumed by our own sin, who will be the laborers in the field? And how can we preach a Gospel of salvation if we are so unsure of our own? How can we preach a God who loves if we are constantly faced with a God who leaves us?