



“You will know them by their fruits.” Mt. 7:16

BISHOP FOSTER

(Methodist)

In 1849, during a most wonderful revival in Cincinnati, in which the subject of entire sanctification was made as important as justification, Dr. Foster, now Bishop, but then pastor of Wesley Chapel, entered into the experience of full salvation. The following narrative is said to have been addressed to Bishop Morris, and is a very clear experience. It was, by consent of the author, published in the Guide, in 1850:--

“In the doctrine of holiness, as taught by our Church, I had long been a professed believer. (I am not certain that I was a clear believer.) My faith was sufficiently strong to give me, at times, great uneasiness of mind, and cause me to make some effort for its attainment. These efforts often were greatly blessed to me, but I always failed to obtain. This continued a number of years. Eventually, when the work of holiness began to be more talked of, and more extensively professed, from the fact that I had failed to obtain it, and because of indiscretion in the lives and language of some who professed it, and from heresies in the instructions of some who taught it, and particularly because I was myself somewhat spoiled with false philosophy, I imbibed a strong antipathy against the whole subject. This opposition of mind, unacknowledged to myself, increased, and became more and more unsettled and deadly. Finally I could have no patience to hear the subject introduced. My whole mind recoiled at it. I felt contempt for those who professed it, and even carefully refrained from naming it in my prayers.

I could not entertain the thought of ever professing, and I scarcely desired to enjoy it. Yet, during all this time, I was at intervals tremendously roused up, and convicted, but straightway relapsed again. During all this dark period I was not without religious comfort, often enjoying most sacred and heavenly communion with God, never wavering in my purpose, or for a moment renouncing my faith. But my mind was perplexed and confused, and filled with prejudice, not against holiness itself, but against its profession, and particularly by myself I once said to a dear friend who was conversing with me on the subject, and urging me to seek it (she was one who I believed enjoyed it), “If my enjoyment of it requires profession, I do not desire it. I do not feel that I could receive it on such terms, or with such involvements.” So dark had I become, -- so dreadfully prejudiced.

During this period, as a consequence of this state of mind, and other causes, I became very much discontented with my position in the Church; the ministry became a burden to me; not so much preaching, -- this I enjoyed; but the pastoral cares and burdens. I became complaining, and anxious to retire, resolved at the first opportunity to avail myself, and become a private local preacher. This was a season of great trial to me, and of many powerful temptations. I became at last completely wretched, -- more a slave than a child. It was manifest to me that in this way I could not lie. Something must be done. In the time of my extremity deliverance came. At a love-feast, at New street, (a

colored Church, and I had always doubted much the religion of these people) under the exercises of these simple, ignorant Christians, I was wonderfully blessed. My whole soul was stirred within me; my heart melted like wax; tears flowed profusely; I praised the Lord aloud. This was a great, timely, and permanent blessing. It continued almost without interruption up to the time which I am about more particularly to describe. My devotions became more spiritual, my duties more delightful, and my graces all acquired new life. In a word, I was greatly, divinely revived.

During this interval I was severely attacked with disease. I was brought low, for about one month prostrated on my bed, part of the time thought to be in a very precarious state, and for several days strictly kept from seeing anyone. This affliction was blessed to me. My mind was gradually brought into a better, higher state. One night, about the time I began decidedly to convalesce, my mind became absorbed in meditations of the goodness of God to me, and my great ingratitude to Him. I may say, "He made all his goodness to pass before me," and all my sinful unworthiness to pass before me. This exercise continued for several hours; more and more my soul became absorbed, until at last my heart seemed to break and melt within me. I wept, I sobbed, I convulsed and cried out. Oh, what a blessing was it which I then received! I could no longer refrain. I awoke my dear Sarah, unconsciously sleeping by my side, and told her what a great blessing I had received; and we wept and praised the Lord together. This was one of the most holy and heavenly influences I had ever felt on my heart. And now I began again to pant for holiness. My prejudices were not all gone, but they were greatly lessened, and I wrestled and prayed with new earnestness and desire for the victory.

As soon as I had sufficiently recovered to engage in public worship, which was about December 20th, I commenced preparation for a protracted meeting in my charge. Meetings were increased, means multiplied. Sabbath before New Year's we commenced daily meetings. The Lord was propitious. The work progressed in the church. Many were revived, a number converted. My own heart shared largely in the divine manifestations. This continued until Thursday, the 10th, when, at the evening service, the whole membership present were invited to join the penitents at the altar in prayer, for a deeper personal baptism, and for their unconverted friends. In this exercise my soul became peculiarly drawn out. Solicitude for my friends became intense, causing me to agonize with God on their account. I soon became unconscious of all that surrounded me, absorbed with my own suit. I had not been long thus engaged, when my attention was, as it were, forcibly drawn to my own case. A reproving finger seemed to point to my own unfaithfulness, and imperfection of religious character, as the cause why some of my friends remained unawakened, unconverted. Here my mind fixed; the impression becoming more and more distressing, until a sense of my unworthiness--nay, real sinfulness -- became intensely painful, almost insupportable. Now I seemed again, as with the pressure of an invisible hand, forcibly conducted into the inmost chamber of my heart, and cherished sins and inward corruptions were revealed to me. How vile I seemed to be! What defilement covered my whole soul as a mantle! What disparity between me, and what a minister of Jesus ought to be! Never did I see inbred corruption in such a light before. I saw, I felt, that this was not the highest state of spirituality. Holiness to the Lord was presented to my mind. I saw, I felt, that it was attainable; that it was possible to all, possible to me. Oh, how I desired it! Now it seemed worse "than death my God to love, and not my God alone." But now came a struggle. The blessing seemed nigh me, within my reach, but how could I venture to receive it? I so unworthy I, so likely to retain it but a day! It seemed precisely what my case required. With new clearness, its necessity and nature were manifested. It was plain, manifest, irresistible, that it was the will of God, even my sanctification. I felt the truth of His promises. Faith, now how easy, how plain! I could believe, I did believe, that my heavenly Father was ready to bestow upon me the

great blessing. But now the controversy was in my will. Would I, would I, receive it? Would I acknowledge it to myself? Would I confess it to others, -- that blessing, after which I had often panted, and then again had almost condemned? Would I, now that my Saviour seemed to bestow it, and incur the responsibilities? I wrestled and agonized on this point. The corruptions of my heart rose up still more distinctly to my view. The question then seemed to be, "Will you consent that Christ should take them all away, and make you holy -- give you a clean heart?" That was the naked point. It was plain -- a point of choice, of decision. It brought a struggle; but, thank God, I was enabled to say yes. When I came to this point I was calm. My agony had now subsided. It was a deliberate choice, -- a choice that Christ should purify my heart, and a firm belief that this was all that was necessary; that, if I would consent He would do it.

Well, what then? I will endeavor truly to describe the spiritual state and exercise which ensued. I give it no name; I cannot. It may be holiness; I find nothing remaining contrary to holiness. On making choice, as above described, the first thing that I discovered was, that I could no longer pray as before. The spirit of earnest entreaty and desire was entirely removed. I had no joy, no special manifestations, -- not so much as usual. I was rather without feeling of any kind. My heart seemed completely emptied of everything, even a sense of want. At this state I felt no alarm; I was satisfied; I wanted nothing. A deep, immovable calm took possession of my heart. I have been happy a thousand times, but my present exercise was new and strange. It was rest, -- rest in God. Inward content. This state continued during the next day, with, I believe, not a fear, not the slightest disturbance. In the evening, with many others, I continued my effort at the public altar, but I could not pray. It was impressed upon my mind as distinctly as though I had heard a voice, that my prayer had prevailed, -- that I had been answered in the thing which I desired, though not in the manner I expected; that I ought therefore rather to praise than to pray; rather to confess than entreat. The witness had not indeed been given in the measure or mode anticipated, but a witness was given. Here, again, was a struggle between doubt and confidence, fear and assurance." Is the work done?" my anxious heart inquired. Conflicting answers were returned. Fear said, "Doubtful." Faith replied, "Fear not, only believe." Here again the Spirit seemed to lead me into the inmost sanctuary of my soul, -- into those chambers where I had before discovered such defilement, and showed me that all was cleansed, that the corruptions which had given me such distress were dead, -- taken away, -- that not one of them remained. I felt the truth of the witness; it was so: I was conscious of it, as conscious as I had ever been of conversion. A change had been wrought in my heart -- a radical conscious change. I was not only peculiarly exercised, but I was changed. I as a new creature; my heart had entered into new and higher existence. This was as evident as transition from darkness to light. Still I had no overflowing joy, no ecstatic rapture, no wonderful manifestations. I have had none yet. Four weeks have now elapsed; my mind remains in the same state, with scarcely a shadow of variation. This is one remarkable fact in my new life -- it is even and sustained. I have been tempted, vilely tempted, but the adversary had found no response; I have had an easy and direct victory over all assaults. It was not with me as it was aforetime; faith brings me instant victory, almost without a conscious effort. I scarcely hope that this will continue but am in daily expectation of sore conflict. My peace continues--a deep, undisturbed, inward calm -- a quiet content of the whole soul. I am now enabled to consecrate myself -- may I say fully? To Christ to be His. I am His. Glory to His name, I am his alone, His entirely, is forever! Glory to God for His "unspeakable gift!" Oh may I continue in this blessed liberty, this divine freedom from sin.

I believe I can live in this state. I did not once believe this. It is questionable if I ever sincerely desired it. It seemed like being over-much religious. Upon this point my mind is changed. I now fully believe it is practical to lead a holy life -- to enjoy entire freedom

from all sin, and complete consecration to God. Oh, how I desire it! And in my heart, by the grace of God, I purpose it. May the Lord Almighty, in whom is all my strength, keep me Himself unto final salvation!

To the praise of God I make this record. Painfully sensible am I of utter unworthiness. I have to contend with shame and confusion and self-abasement every moment. The recollection of the past torments me. Myself I abhor, as having loved corruption; but to Jesus be glory for ever! "Jehovah has triumphed; His servant is free. In this place I stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." What a wonderful deliverance the Lord hath wrought! Ought not I to praise Him? Ought not I to publish this great salvation? What a rest He hath found for my soul! A rest of naked, simple faith. To Him be all glory for ever. Amen.

Source: "Holiness Miscellany And Experiences" by John S. Inskip



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