



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

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(Methodist)

My oldest brother, long since glorified, was mainly instrumental in bringing me into the Christian fold, when I was twenty years of age. At the very outset, my attention was directed to the subject of Christian perfection, and thenceforth I felt an intense desire for its experience. Two years afterwards I was thrust out into the itinerant ministry, when I felt need of it, if possible, more than ever. And during my first six months in the ministry I was enabled “to believe and enter in.” Yet I had not learned to live by faith alone; and when, after a time, I was called to traverse one of those barren times, so common in my pilgrimage, faith, unsustained by feeling, gave way. I lost first the witness of the blessing, and then the blessing itself.

Ever afterwards I mourned the loss with great bitterness, but did not, for many years, set myself resolutely to recover my ground. Often, when preaching on the subject, my heart would glow with something so like the old fire, that for a little time it would seem as if I was again in possession of my lost treasure. Seldom did I reprove sinners for neglecting Christ, or encourage the penitent to trust Him now for salvation, without feeling that my reproofs and exhortations were as applicable to myself as those to whom they were directed. Sometimes, however, my discouragement was so great, that I almost doubted the reality of such an experience.

My thirteenth year in the ministry commenced very much as those preceding had done. But soon afterwards, near the close of 1845, I read, in the *Christian Advocate and Journal*, a stirring appeal on the subject of holiness in the ministry. To me it was a word in season. I read it, thought upon it, and the Holy Spirit applied it. I was deeply convicted – convicted that my experience was sadly defective; that I was suffering heavy loss in consequence, loss which I could by no means afford; that I was defrauding the Church, and Christ, the head of the Church, by neglecting an essential qualification for my work; and that, in this neglect, I was utterly inexcusable.

The resolution was at once formed, that, by God’s help, I would be guilty of this criminal neglect no longer. I knelt right down before God, and sought pardon for the past, and then solemnly presented myself “a living sacrifice unto God, through Jesus Christ.” It was one of the most solemn transactions of my life. I realized its full import, and entered into it in view of all its consequences. I felt that, though no human eye saw me, no human ear heard, no human hand registered the vows uttered, yet there were eyes that saw, ears that heard, and a hand that recorded. And in view of all, the vow of consecration was deliberated voluntarily and resolutely taken.

Yet it was not done with a struggle. There was strong and persistent opposition to it, on the part of the “flesh,” to say nothing of other forces. There was a disposition to make some exceptions in the consecration; to spare some little idols; avoid some crosses, some self-denials. There was such as God offers, and to which I was authorized to hold Him, but such as I might suggest. There was also a disposition to make a consecration of limited duration; not final, not perpetual, not irrevocable. Almost any thing would be accepted that did not at once, and forever, cut off all “provision for the flesh.”

Some of these suggestions assumed definite form, though they were mostly presented in so covert a manner as not to attract attention at the time. But they were strongly urged, nevertheless, and some of

them would have been successfully urged, nevertheless, and some of them would have been successfully urged, had not

“Jesus, Himself the stronger show’d,
And claimed me for His own.”

With a strength of purpose which, I am sure, was from Him who “giveth more grace,” -- overcoming grace, I made the consecration – made it without condition, without limitation. I made it in humble reliance upon His grace to help me, His mercy to pardon my failures, and His blood to cleanse me.

And now, having placed myself in His hands, I humbly, reverently, yet resolutely, held Him to His promise. The act of consecration is, sometimes, described as an abandonment of one’s self into the hands of God. But I cannot so regard it. I am sure that I did abandon, but intrusted myself to Him. He had graciously given His promise to save, and that promise was a condition precedent in the whole transaction. As to the mode of treatment, the surrender was unconditional, but God had condescended to obligate Himself as to the result. And pleading His promise, I said, “I am Thine, save me.”

I had intrusted myself to Him to be saved from all sin, and that He would thus save me, I had no doubt. And I felt entirely confident that He would finish the work just as soon as I was ready for it. I rejoiced in the glorious hope of perfect love; though not, as yet, in the actual possession of it. “I waited patiently for the Lord,” using, diligently, all available helps; hourly expecting deliverance, yet willing that He should choose His own time, and employ His own methods. And it pleased Him so to deal with me, that every stage of my progress, every phase of my experience, was marked with the utmost distinctness.

I now went immediately to my people, and told them what was done. In the pulpit, in the social meeting, in private, and wherever I had suitable opportunity, I confessed my great want; preached Christ, a present Saviour from all sin, and urged the Church to come with me, and prove His great salvation. The effect was very soon manifest in an earnest hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Several experienced the blessing before I did, and became my teachers. An extensive revival broke out, many sinners were converted, and a goodly company raised up to testify that “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.”

In the meantime I was passing through a most fearful spiritual conflict, or series of conflicts. It may be that my former failures, and still more my inveterate unbelief, rendered necessary a somewhat unusual severity of treatment. It sometimes seemed as if the power of darkness were all let loose upon me, “sworn to destroy.” Yet the great struggle was against the foe within. All the latent evils of my nature – evil that I had supposed long since subdued, if not utterly destroyed, seemed to start all at once into full activity. I had prayed the Lord to give me a sight of my own heart, that I might know the extent and malignity of the disease, but had no idea the prayer was to be answered in this way.

Instead of looking in upon my heart, and seeing inbred sin, as I would look upon a disgusting ulcer, objectively, I felt sin – felt it in the form of sinful tempers, words, and acts. And it was often with the utmost difficulty that I could check this tendency – that I could control these impulses as to avoid actual sin. And this continued almost to the very last. However it may be in the experience of others, certain it is, that, in my case, the “old man” did not waste imperceptibly away, nor die exhausted and worn out by lingering disease. It was a violent death – a crucifixion – and the death struggle was terrible indeed.

Yet during all this time I was enabled to “both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.” Not for one moment did I draw back from the engagement, nor regret the step I had taken. In seasons of deepest distress I would not for worlds, it seems to me, have been placed back where I was before. “The vow was past beyond repeal” --beyond all desire for its repeal. I had counted the cost, and knew it to be comparatively trifling. I felt all the time delightfully assured that whatever the cost, the

transaction was wholly in my own interest, that every thing I might suffer was to my own advantage.

Never but once, did I feel even a momentary discouragement. And that was but for a moment, otherwise it seems to me I could not have borne the buffetings of Satan, and the agonizing struggles of inbred sin, but now I was to endure a trial still more severe. This was the final trial to which my faith was to be subjected, and by which it was to be freed from all remaining mixture. It was a crisis, too, a most important crisis, in the pending struggle.

It came thus: I was praying, and the Spirit seemed helping my infirmities, making intercession in me with groanings that could not be uttered. "My longing heart was all on fire to be dissolved in love." I really thought "the long expected hour" had come, and that God was about to "bless me with His perfect love." With eager expectancy I reached out to receive the blessing – but it was gone! The tide of feelings instantly subsided, the spirit of prayer left me, and I felt as if being driven back to wander again in the wilderness. I looked wistfully over to the Canaan of my hopes, which, it seemed, I was not permitted to enter.

The anguish of that moment no language can describe. There was a feeling of blank, utter discouragement. Several times before, in my past experience, I had come up to this point, and right here had always failed. And now must I fail here again? Was this a point beyond which I could not, must not go? Must I drag out the miserable remainder of life burdened and polluted with sin? Was there none to "deliver me from the body of this death?" It was not the temporary disappointment of my hopes – that I had borne, and could bear it again. It was not that I feared possible apostasy and ruin – that did not enter my mind. There was no fear of punishment. But, sin! I do not think I ever loathed it so before. And must I harbor it in my heart? Must its polluting presence be with me everywhere – in all I do, or say, or think. Or feel? Must I carry it with me to the very close of life? In an agony, I cried out, "Must it be? Oh, God, must it be?" In that instant I received strength to say resolutely, No. It need not to be, and, God helping me, it shall be not be. God's word is out, His truth is pledged, and I will trust Him, I will believe. Henceforth it shall make no difference with my faith whether my feelings are encouraging or discouraging. I will believe, not because I feel, but because God speaks. I saw plainly that He would have me to trust His word, without additional security – that He would have all the sand cleared away, and leave only the rock for me to build upon. The trial had accomplished its mission.

This was the last severe trial to which I was subjected. But I had one more preparatory lesson to learn, one that proves of great value to me whenever I have to wait, as is often the case, for an answer to prayer. But I hardly know how to characterize it. Perhaps Paul meant it, or something like it, in the exhortation, "pray without ceasing." It is not to bring one's petition repeatedly, but to have it continuously before the King. It is to present it to Him once for all, never to be withdrawn, not for one moment, though He may be often reminded of it, His attention called to it, as an unanswered prayer, and, until answered, as involving an unfulfilled promise. As I now look back upon past experiences, I see that I had often prayed, and with great earnestness, but not receiving an answer, had given up the suit for that time. In this way though I did not intend it, the petition was actually withdrawn for the present, to be presented again with the hope of better success at some future time. Of course God cannot be expected to answer prayers that are not before Him.

On the occasion of which I am about to speak, I had been praying for the blessing of a clean heart, and was about to cease, as I had done so often. But just then a new light shone upon me. It did not startle me as new, indeed I did not think of the light, but only the truth which it revealed, and the revelation seemed made to the heart rather than the intellect. I felt that I need not withdraw my request, but might leave it before God to plead on, so to speak, "without ceasing." I acted upon the suggestion at once, and said, as I had not before,

“Never will I remove
Out of thy hands my cause;
But rest in thy redeeming love,
And hang upon thy cross.”

There was an immediate and entire change in the character of my experience. Yet the change came so without “observation,” that it did not seem sudden. I seemed to be elevated to a higher plane, yet so gently that I knew it not until it was done – to be in permanent communication with the “throne of grace,” without knowing when the connection was formed. The tumult had ceased, and an indescribable calm had taken possession of my soul. The painful sense of inward pollution, that had so long oppressed me was gone, and I could discover nothing within contrary to perfect love. Those about me observed the change, and understood its significance. To me it was wonderful, yet it seemed negative rather than positive. The house seemed empty and swept, but not garnished. I could give no clear account of my spiritual status. In the absence of the direct, positive witness of the Spirit, I did not dare to say I was saved from all sin; and yet I did not dare to say it was not so. It was not properly a state of doubt, hardly of suspense, but rather of calm, trustful waiting for further light. It was as when the weary, tempest-tossed mariner finds shelter in some safe, quiet harbor of his hopes. I needed rest, and for the present, at least, had found it.

For a day or two afterwards I was aware of an experience, which I know not how otherwise to describe, than as a gradual filling up. It seemed as though my heart had been emptied of sin, and filling up with righteousness. My rest was broken. I was called to a neighboring town to assist for the next two days in a protracted meeting. Here, in preaching, and in the social meeting, I was greatly blessed. I spoke freely of my experience, and felt all the time that I was gaining higher ground. The view at times, opened out before me so glorious, so vast, that I could hardly refrain from crying out, “O, the ocean! O, the ocean!” It seemed that nothing but the boundless and fathomless ocean could convey any fitting idea of the vastness and fullness of blessing that was presented before me.

The light continued to increase, so that before reaching home I felt delightfully assured that the work of entire sanctification was wrought. I felt, too, that, for my own sake, for my brethren’s sake, and, above all, for Christ’s sake, I must not delay telling “how great things God had done for me.” Accordingly, I determined to speak of it in the social meeting that was held at night. I was not aware of any excitement, but my heart was full, actually overflowing with praise. In this spirit I went to the meeting. But when the time came for me to speak, my feelings had changed. The witness of the Spirit seemed to be withdrawn, I was without joy, almost without feeling. But the witness had been clear, and was as yet uncontradicted, and I felt that I must not hesitate to give God the glory for what he had wrought.

I felt that this, too, was a crisis and to falter here was to lose the ground already gained. Looking upward for light to see the path of duty, and for the grace to walk in it, I proceeded to testify, that the blood of Jesus Christ had cleansed me from all sin; and gathering strength as I proceeded, I testified that it did at that moment cleanse me from all sin. As I made this declaration, the witness, which had been obscured, was restored, and with indescribable clearness. I seemed to have passed beyond the confines of belief, into the region of actual knowledge. The evidence, which was clear before, was perfectly overwhelming now. I could no more doubt the work than I could doubt my own existence. At the same time I found myself almost sinking under a weight of glory. I was overwhelmed with a flood of glory. It possessed every power of my soul. It filled my whole being. The Lord whom I sought had suddenly come to His temple, and His glory filled the house.

All that I had suffered in reaching this point of experience now seemed as nothing. That for which I had agonized through those long and weary weeks, was gained at last. I had awaking with my Savior’s likeness, and was satisfied.

In reviewing the testimony of this able witness, the editor can scarcely forbear adding a few words, by

way of helping others, who have, alike with this devoted minister, struggled for months amid the alterations of hope and fear. If he had sooner rested on the bare declaration, "I WILL RECEIVE YOU," how much sooner he might have entered into rest! God's Word is its own evidence. He that believeth hath the witness in himself. Our brother says, "When the time came for me to speak, my feelings were changed.' But it was well for himself and the cause of holiness, that in this instance, he did not make his feelings the criterion for his faith. Had his faith changed with his feelings, he would have given a wavering testimony. But acting on the principle that "God's Word is its own evidence," he was true to the Divine order. With the heart he believed, and therefore with the mouth he confessed. And how gloriously did God honor his faith and show him His salvation. Be it ever remembered that it is not a profession of feeling, but an unwavering profession of faith, that God requires. "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering: for He is faithful that hath promised."

Source: "Pioneer Experiences" by Phoebe Palmer

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