



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

EDGAR M. LEVY

(Baptist)

It pleased God in my earliest childhood to call me by His Holy Spirit. As far back as memory will allow me to go I can recall seasons of great distress on account of sin. When other children around me were busy at play I would often invent some excuse to withdraw, that I might find a place where I could weep before God in secret.

The weary burden grew heavier with my increasing years. As fast as my mental powers were developed so as to understand, in a measure, the law of God, my condemnation and ruin became more alarmingly real. I cannot look back to this period of life as men usually do. They were not to me days of mirth, but days in which even childhood's laughter was turned into weeping and its buoyancy into heaviness.

My parents, who were intelligent, cheerful, and exemplary Christians, were connected with the Chambers Presbyterian Church, and resided, at this time, distant from the sanctuary of their choice and opposite a Methodist Church. Here I would occasionally attend, and listen to the sainted Pitman and other faithful men of God. It was at this time, when only thirteen years of age, that the burden of sin was removed, and I had peace with, God through our Lord Jesus Christ. I can remember the very place, time, and circumstances in which this wondrous change occurred. For many days I had gone sorrowing. I cried unto God for the pardon promised to the penitent; but He seemed deaf to my entreaties. One night in the great congregation I presented myself for prayer; but no peace came.

I returned home and retired at once to my chamber. I knelt near the window and heard, or seemed to hear, the voice of One saying unto me, "I love them that love me; and they that seek me early shall find me." That promise was mine. It was my Father's assurance of a loving welcome. It was but a moment, and I was in His arms. It was a rapturous hour. All things were changed. Sorrowing and sighing fled from my bosom. The Spirit of God witnessed with my spirit that I was born again. "Being justified by faith, I had peace with God." I never afterward had a doubt of my conversion. Even in the most unsatisfactory days of my Christian life I could not question the reality of the work of grace in my youthful heart.

In my twenty-first year I was ordained pastor of the First Baptist Church, West Philadelphia, then just organized. Here God greatly blessed my labors in the salvation of sinners. I often marveled how one so partially consecrated could be so successful. I am conscious now that I was proud of my success, and that it was needful for God to humble and afflict me.

After a pastorate of fourteen years I accepted a call to Newark, N. J. Here, also, God wonderfully blessed my labors, and hundreds were added to the Church. But O, how were all my services, even the best, mixed with selfishness, ambition and pride! A consciousness of this often filled me with shame and sorrow. Then I would make a new

effort to improve my life by more watchfulness, zeal, and prayer; and although failure was sure to follow, yet, not knowing of any better method, I would tread the same weary road over and over again.

Severe afflictions visited me. The sweetest voice of the household group was hushed; the brightest eyes were darkened in death; health failed; many friends proved unreliable; hopes withered, and the way grew rough and thorny. My unsanctified soul, instead of learning submission, became impatient of restraint, would sometimes murmur against the dealings of God with me, question His wisdom, and doubt His love. These feelings would not always prevail. There would be periods of relenting. Mortified at the indulgence of unChristian passions, I could not refrain from weeping before God with true contrition of heart; but it was only to return to the same bitter experience. That marvelous portrait which is hung up in the seventh chapter of Romans, and which portrays the fearful struggle between will and power between the evil that is hated and yet committed, and the good that is approved and yet not performed is a faithful picture of my condition at this time.

After a residence of ten years in Newark I returned, in the autumn of 1868, to the scene of my early labors, and became pastor of the Berean Baptist Church, Philadelphia. Here I found the religious condition of the members of my new charge as unsatisfactory as my own. They were in a cold, barren, worldly state. I have seldom seen a church more broken and paralyzed. I grieved for them with tender compassion. This solicitude in their behalf produced a fresh consciousness of my own imperfections. I hated sin. I felt that it weakened my moral powers, grieved the Holy Spirit, interrupted my communion with God and impaired my usefulness. One Sunday afternoon I entered my schoolroom unusually depressed. A sense of utter helplessness came over me. As my tear-dimmed eyes surveyed the school I was painfully moved by the number of adult scholars who were unconverted. I returned to my study crying, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

In February, 1871, M. Purdy, an evangelist, was holding meetings in the Methodist Church adjacent to mine. I was invited by the pastor to attend these efforts to promote Christian holiness. I went timidly at first, and yet I continued to go every afternoon for several days. There were divine influences drawing me there. Many Christians from different churches were also in attendance. Day after day, with meekness and gentleness, and yet with unwavering confidence they told the story of long years of conflict, and of ultimate and complete triumph through simple faith in the blood that cleanses from all sin, of their soul rest and abiding peace of their power with God and man and the fullness of their joy.

At first I became deeply interested, and then my heart began to melt. I said: These Christians are certainly in possession of a secret of wonderful power and sweetness. What can it be? Is it justification? No; it cannot be that. I have experienced the blessing of justification; by it I have been absolved from all my past sins; by it I stand in the righteousness of Christ, and every privilege of a child of God, and every grace of the blessed Holy Spirit, has been secured to me; but I do not realize that it has destroyed the power of inbred sin, or ended "the war in my members," or brought to me complete rest of soul. I have peace; but it is often broken by "fear which has torment." I am conscious of loving God, but like some sickly, flickering flame, I am expecting every moment to see it expire altogether.

I have joy, but, like a shallow brook, the drought exhausts it. I have faith, but it is such a poor, weak thing, that I am in doubt, sometimes, whether it is faith at all. "I hate vain thoughts"; and yet they continue to come, and seem at home in my mind. I believe that Jesus saves from sin; and yet I sin from day to day, and the dark stains are everywhere visible. Prayer is wonderfully sweet; but alas! It often becomes an effort. To work for

Christ is a great privilege; but it often wearies me or degenerates into mere routine.

The ordinances of religion yield comfort and strength; but I find as often that all spirituality and power have retreated from them, leaving their channels dry. I sometimes get glimpses of Him whom my soul loveth, but, O! How soon the bright vision fades; and “he hideth himself” is again the deep, earnest cry of my heart. Now, these believers have an experience altogether different from mine. Once, it is true, they felt as I feel, and mourned as I mourn, over broken vows, sinful tempers, intermittent devotions, and repeated failures. But a wonderful change is now manifest. They are rooted and grounded in love. Being made free from sin, they now bring forth fruit unto holiness. Having purged themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit they have become “vessels unto honor, sanctified and meet for the Masters use, and prepared unto every good work.” *My desires were kindled. An insatiable hunger seized my soul.*

Just at this stage of my experience the meetings ended, and Mr. Purdy was compelled to leave for another appointment. Before leaving however, a suggestion was made that he might be induced to return and hold meetings in my own church. It was a surprise to me. I was not sure that my people would consent. I could do nothing, therefore, but leave it for the decision of the church on the coming Sabbath. I did so, and, greatly to my surprise, there was not the slightest objection raised. It was of the Lord.

During the ten days that preceded the meeting I was more than usually prayerful. I commenced a careful examination of the doctrine of sanctification. I reviewed my theological studies. I could scarcely think, or read, or pray on any other subject. I conversed with intimate friends of my own and other denominations. Nearly all of them pronounced the views advanced as nothing else than unscriptural and pernicious errors. They admitted the existence and universality of the disease, but could tell me of no adequate remedy this side of the grave. They allowed that the malady might be soothed to some degree; but in this life, they affirmed, it could never be perfectly healed.

I searched the Scriptures, but, alas! My eyes were blind, so that I could not see that perfect deliverance from sin which God has provided, through the redemption of Christ, for His believing people. Those passages in the word of God which require of all His children holiness of character, purity of heart, the entire sanctification of the soul, body and spirit, I was led to regard, from educational training, as marks – very high indeed – after which every Christian should aspire; but to which no one could ever attain; or else as figurative expressions, indicating that at conversion we were made, in some judicial sense, holy before God.

These views, however, could no longer satisfy me. I had an intense longing for something better. With the poet, my poor heart cried out:

“I’m weary of the strife within,
O let me turn from self and sin!”

The first day of our meeting had come. The church was well filled. I introduced Mr. Purdy. But I had many misgivings, and a secret desire in my heart that he would say nothing about sanctification, but bend all his efforts to the conversion of sinners. This, however, was not his way. Like a wise master-builder, he commenced to lay the foundation broad and deep. He took our Confession of Faith, and urged, from the teaching contained therein, that we should accept the doctrine of sanctification by faith. Our Covenant was next produced; and here he reminded us that in this we solemnly promised that we would so regulate our lives as to enable us to “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” Last of all, he spoke of our baptism as a beautiful symbol of our death unto sin; our burial with Christ, and our resurrection to a new and holy life. “According to your form of baptism,” he said, “the body is buried in water as

the corpse is buried in the grave. In all your teachings on this subject you insist that it is a figure of the believer's death and burial unto sin.

But that is not all. You not only claim, in this act, that you die to sin, but that you also rise to a life of holiness. 'Now, if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that, Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'" (Rom. 6). With great emotion, and emphasis he said, "You have the type, the figure, the symbol: will you deny the doctrine, and make what distinguishes you as a denomination a mere empty, lifeless ceremonial?"

After the sermon a number of persons bore testimony to the fullness and completeness of their present salvation. They represented several evangelical denominations – the Methodist, the Episcopalian, the Presbyterian, the Friend, the Baptist; and there was a beautiful harmony in all that they said. I had no reason to doubt the truthfulness of their statements. "I might question," I thought, "their logic, find fault with their theories, and reject their phraseology; but how could I dispose of their experience?" My judgment was assailed as it had never been before. After the meeting I returned to my study, fell upon the floor, and poured out my soul before God. I did not pray for pardon, but for purity. I did not seek clearer evidences of my acceptance, but to be "made free from sin," not in a judicial or theological sense, but by a real, conscious, holiness created in my heart. That night I was unable to sleep. I was completely broken down in heart before God. The vision of Isaiah seemed reproduced. "I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up ... Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone: because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

The morning at last dawned, and on every ray I could read, "Walk in the light as He is in the light." "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts," as chanted by the seraphim, seemed floated through all the air. As I thought of God, it was not so much His power or wisdom or justice or love that attracted my attention, as His infinite, spotless holiness. "That day, Friday, March 9, 1871, was observed by the church as a special season of fasting, humiliation (lowering dignity), and prayer. *My soul was in great agony. I can compare my experience on this memorable day to nothing else than crucifixion. It seemed to me that I had gone up with Christ to Calvary and was transfixed to the cruel and shameful cross. A sense of loneliness and abandonment stole over my mind. "An horror, of great darkness, fell upon me," and all the powers of hell assaulted my soul. The enemy brought before me, with tremendous force, my lifelong prejudices, my theological training, my professional standing, my denominational pride. I felt that I must leave everything behind me should I go any farther in this direction. The dread of being misunderstood, of having my motives questioned, of being called "unsound in doctrine," of being slighted by my ministerial brethren, and treated with suspicion and coldness, filled my heart with unspeakable anguish. Everything appeared to be sliding from under my feet. My sight grew dim, my strength departed, and faintness, like unto death, came upon me.*

This mental conflict, however, soon subsided. The storm clouds passed away, and light began to stream in. I was now done with theorizing, with philosophical doubts and vain speculations. The struggle was over. I cared no longer for the opinions of men. I was willing to be a fool for Christ and to suffer the loss of all things. I was like a little child. I cried out, "Teach me thy way, O Lord! And lead me in a plain path." Just then the fountain of cleansing was revealed. Jesus stood before me with His bleeding wounds, saying, "Come in! Come in!"

I turned to my congregation and said, "I stand before you today a poor, weak, and

helpless sinner. I have tried to find the way of holiness by every possible means. All my efforts, my struggles, my prayers, my fasting, and my round of Christian duties have proved miserable failures. God is making a wonderful revelation to my long-darkened understanding. I am confident now that it is not by growth, or by effort; or by works of any kind; 'for then would our salvation be of works, and not of grace.' 'In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.' That day has come. Here lies the fountain of my Saviour's blood. It was opened for me, even me."

I fell upon my knees and bowed my face to the floor. For a moment I felt that I was sinking in a great sea, and that all its waves were going over me. But they did not seem to be the waters of death.

The Spirit of God whispered those precious words: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." My faith laid hold of this wonderful truth; a strange peace entered into my soul. I exclaimed within myself, "I am free! My heart, my soul, my mind, my body, are washed in the blood of the Lamb!" It was all so strange, so new, so unlike anything I had ever experienced before, that I could not utter a word, and then the only sentiment of my heart was; "Lord, it is done! I am saved!" When the meeting ended I repaired immediately to the parsonage. I experienced great physical exhaustion, like Jacob, who was never so weak as when he had just prevailed with the angel.

I threw myself into a chair, and at once the blessed baptism came. I seemed filled with all the fulness of God. I wept for joy. All night long I wept. All the next day, at the family altar, in the street, and in the sanctuary, tears continued to flow. The fountains of my being seemed broken up, and my heart was dissolved in gratitude and praise. My soul seemed filled with pulses, every one thrilling and throbbing with such waves of love and rapture that I thought I must die from excess of life.

At once I had a new and wonderful sense of the presence of Christ. Those words of Jesus were made real to me: "Abide in me, and I in you." I had now an abiding Christ. With Mrs. Edwards I could say, "The presence of God was so near, so precious and so real, that I seemed scarcely conscious of anything else. The whole world, with all its enjoyments and all its troubles, seemed to be nothing; my God was my all, my only portion."

The sovereign will of God seemed at once so sweet and blessed that I felt lost in the thought that God ruled over and in me. I found myself praising Him for every trial, sorrow, disappointment, and loss.

My sense of unworthiness was greatly quickened. I felt so small, so weak, so utterly nothing, I could no longer pray in the sanctuary, as had been my custom, in a standing position. I wanted to keep sinking lower and lower. And this desire brought a strange pleasure.

I felt a sweet spirit of forgiveness in my heart. It was easy for me to pray for those who had injured me; persons who had become repulsive to me appeared, all at once, as possessing many excellences. I saw so much more to admire, and so much less to condemn, in the people of God, that it seemed God had "made all things new."

My love for the brethren was much enlarged. Denominational distinction disappeared, and my heart flowed out in tender affection for "all those that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

Answers to prayer were continually occurring. The promise was made good, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." One out of many instances of

this nature I wish to relate. During two or three weeks I had scarcely slept at all, first from excess of sorrow and then from excess of joy. Night after night witnessed my utter inability to sleep. Mind and body began to show great nervous exhaustion, which only increased the tendency to wakefulness. One night after retiring, and suffering as before, it occurred to me, "Now ask Jesus." At once I raised my heart in prayer, saying, "Blessed Jesus! I need sleep. Effort will not bring it. I now seek it from Thee; let me go to sleep." Immediately I fell asleep, and continued to sleep soundly all that night and every night since.

My mind became solemnly impressed with the personality of the devil. For several days, it is true, he was not permitted to attack my soul in the slightest manner. For the first time in my life I was so free from all temptation that I was not conscious of his existence. But it was only for a time. One afternoon, just as I took my seat in the pulpit, Satan stood at my side (not in his heart) in dread personality. To my mental sight he appeared, as never before, fearfully and maliciously real.

At once I became unconscious of all beside. He suggested such thoughts as these: "Your present experience is, I admit, very satisfactory. But will it continue? What will you do when these meetings shall end, and these birds are done singing, and all these Christians are gone to their several churches and you shall be alone?" Words utterly fail to convey to another the malignant force of these satanic utterances.

But with humble boldness I answered, "I can do without the creature, but not without the Creator. Human sympathy and Christian fellowship are inexpressibly sweet; but they are not indispensable to my happiness or safety. Possessing Christ I have all." "And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." (Zech. 3:1-4). At once I had such a ravishing view of the infinite loveliness and all-sufficiency of Jesus that my heart glowed with new rapture, as the words of the poet came flashing upon my mind:

"O Lord! I would delight in Thee,
And on Thy, care depend;
To Thee in every trouble flee,
My best, my only Friend.

"When all created streams are dried
Thy fullness is the same;
May I with this be satisfied,
And glory in Thy name!"
Instantly the devil fled, and I was dissolved in tears of gratitude.

Several weeks after this, while riding in a streetcar, I was again fiercely assaulted by this enemy of all righteousness. Thoughts of evil darted through my mind like summer lightning. I remember well how, in former years, I would exert all my mental powers to put from me these vile suggestions. It used to be a mighty conflict between the powers of darkness and my own puny strength; and it seldom ended without leaving its stain and involving my soul in great spiritual depression. But now, without an effort or a struggle, I found myself, like a fluttered dove, fleeing to Christ. In a moment the thoughts of evil were gone, and my soul exulted in the triumphs of all-victorious faith:

“The dove hath neither claw nor sting,
Nor weapon for to fight;
She owes her safety to her wing,
Her victory to flight.”

The personality and office-work of the blessed Holy Spirit were revealed to my spiritual perceptions as they had never been before. He taught me more of His own adorable being in one moment than I had learned from theological treatises during all my life. And O! What a Comforter He became to me! He seemed to regard me as a little, weak, convalescent child, that needed to be carried in the arms and comforted. He had been before my Reprover; but now He sweetly whispered, “No more reproof, no more wounding. I am come to comfort, to heal, to sanctify, and to ‘abide with you forever.’”

Indeed, all the doctrines of the Gospel at once became luminous in the presence of the Sanctifier. What was formerly a speculative conviction became now a wondrous reality. What once appeared in dim outline, like some beautiful landscape partly revealed by moonlight, now glowed with distinct and golden splendor.

Life has become marvelously simplified and natural. I no longer work for liberty, but as having liberty; not for, but from life. That which before was either impossible, or at least difficult, is now natural and easy.

I do not find this life – what in my ignorance I once regarded it – one of mysticism, indolence, and self-pleasing, but a life of ceaseless activity amid undisturbed repose; of perpetual absence of all weariness amid perpetual employment. Neither do I find it a condition of stagnation. All life involves growth, and there are no limits to the possibilities of growth in the life of faith. The more the soul receives the more it is capable of receiving, and the more it yearns to receive. I have not found that this experience exempts us from trial, persecution and disappointment. For me the way has frequently been strewn with thorns rather than roses. Unkindness has often wounded my heart. Friends have turned away, sometimes with pity and sometimes with blame. At times I have been in heaviness through manifold temptation, and faith has almost yielded to the outward pressure; but, blessed be God, for sixteen years I have been preserved from all murmuring, disquietude, or fear. The trials have not been too many or too severe. Every arrow has been feathered with love, and every furnace blast has but consumed the dross. I am saved! Saved to the uttermost! Glory to the Lamb!

EDGAR M. LEVY PHILADELPHIA, PA., March, 1887

Source: “Forty Witnesses” by S. Olin Garrison



[The Enter His Rest website](#)