



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

George Penderson's Story

Sometimes intelligent conversations are difficult because the terms being used are misunderstood. A word may mean one thing to the speaker and a totally different thing to the listener.

As a result, each is hearing what is said in the context of his own understanding, thinking different thoughts, and totally missing the point of the other. An example can easily be seen in the use of the words "holiness" and "sanctification." Unless the terms are defined clearly, speaker and listener may discuss these subjects, each thinking he is understanding the other, but neither of them is thinking along the same lines.

There are other times when a speaker in trying to describe an event or an experience may not know the correct descriptive words to use to define what is being said, nor even that the words exist that would be understood by the hearer. An example of that very thing can be seen here in the story of George Penderson.

This is not a story taken from some past history, but one that is current. George related it to me three days ago while sitting at our kitchen table. That was on December 18, 2004.

I first met George and his lovely wife Clarisse last summer, and immediately sensed the kinship with them that is one of the great mysteries of the Christian life. At that time they told us (my wife and I) a bit about themselves. They had been short term missionaries twice, once in Indonesia and once in India in the set-up of new hospitals, because of Clarisse's knowledge and ability to teach nursing skills. We were thrilled by their exciting account of God's grace in their lives.

But little did I know that it was not the whole story – indeed, far from it. I learned much more of the story of George last Saturday.

George is a short, stocky, white-haired man in his seventies, whose body is slightly twisted and who walks with a cane. One look at him tells you that once this was a physically powerful man. His handshake is firm; there is a twinkle in his eye and a ready laugh on his lips; and there is a certain glow about him. I cannot describe it in any better way than that: a glow, a radiance. Looking at George reminded me instantly of the book by Harry Jessop, "I Met a Man With a Shining Face." To fully understand what George has become, we must know what background events shaped him. That background takes us all the way back to World War II in France.

George was a soldier: trained to hate and to kill. While in the process of fulfilling the mission for which he was trained, one day in a battle in France he was severely wounded. As he lay there on a stretcher waiting to be evacuated, first to Paris, then to England, and finally back to the United States, his Sergeant, a Jewish man, leaned over his mangled body and said, "George you are going home. God bless you." This Sergeant was later killed in battle. From England, George was transported to America, along with over a thousand other wounded GI's, aboard the Queen Mary.

He said the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor never looked so good as it did on the day he arrived back from the War.

Once he was back home, he spent many months in the Army hospital recovering from his wounds, but it became evident that his body was not the only part of George that required healing. He had become bitter and angry and violent, so for many more months after he was healed physically, he was treated in the psychiatric section of the hospital. His recovery there was even slower than the recovery of his body, but out of it came one great blessing to George. The beautiful young nurse who cared for him was Clarisse!

Soon her tenderness and loving care deepened into a new kind of love, and after his release from the hospital, George and Clarisse were married. Now, sixty years later, they are a happy loving couple, but to get to the place they are now was not an easy road for either of them, mainly because of the pent up anger, resentment and bitterness hidden way down inside George.

He sat across the table looked me in the eye, and said, "I was mean." He repeated it several times over, "I was a mean, mean, mean man." He went on with his story, relating one instance of the meanness within him.

One of his closest friends was another mean man; one who had played football in university and later in professional ball. This man had earned the reputation for being the hardest hitting linebacker in the NFL with his inner meanness. In that respect, he and George were alike, both were mean, violent men, as you will soon see.

George and this man who we will call J. B., worked for J. B.'s uncle, who was a Christian. One Thanksgiving day, George and J. B. were guests at this uncle's home for holiday dinner. While they were waiting, J. B. said, "Come with me for a little bit. I may need your help."

As they rode along in the car, George asked where they were going and what they were going to do.

J. B. named a certain bar where a man who owed him money was supposed to be that morning. "I am tired of his excuses for not paying me what he owes me," said J. B., "and if he doesn't pay me today, you and I are going to kill him." That suited George to a tee and he was ready to kill the debtor, and would even have done it alone for his friend. When they entered the bar, the man who owed the debt was sitting on a barstool drinking. J. B. asked for his money, and the debtor said he didn't have it. J. B. grabbed him by the throat with one powerful hand and lifted him up clear off of the stool, telling him that they were going to kill him. The man pled for his life and said a friend, bringing the money, would arrive in about fifteen minutes. They all sat down to wait, but continued to threaten the man with death if he was lying again and the money didn't show up at the allotted time. In fifteen minutes, the money arrived and J. B. was paid what he was owed. God's unseen hand was at work saving these two men from an act of violence that would have followed them the rest of their lives.

Later J. B., was saved and became a regionally known evangelist. As a result, J. B. and George parted company.

At this point in his account, George, leaned forward in his chair and gripped my arm in both of his hands. "I was mean," he repeated. He told of his meanness in saying cutting things to Clarisse, and the ways in which he hurt her. He said, "I was mean to Clarisse." However, the day came when George was convicted by the Holy Spirit. When he could resist no longer, he prayed and sought the Lord and was truly born-again and became a new creature in Christ. How he rejoiced in his new life in Christ! He began attending the Baptist Church where he was saved, reading his Bible and praying faithfully every day. His life had been transformed. He was brand new. Clarisse who had already been saved was filled with joy to now have a Christian husband. Together they became examples of what Christians could and should be.

Sometime later, he once again met J. B. who said, "I understand you have become my brother." Upon hearing George's reply the two of them rejoiced together.

George knew from his own experience that he had become a new creature in Christ, of that there could be no doubt. George knew it, the church knew it, their family knew it, the neighbors knew it, as did anyone who knew them. The joy of sins forgiven and the wonder of the new life filled him and amazed him.

But it was not long until George found that not everything in his heart was as he wanted it to be. There remained in his heart an explosive vestige of that old meanness, and at times it would erupt and cause hurt, usually to Clarisse, and inner conflict and grief to George. While he was quick to take it to the Lord for forgiveness and to make any hurt right with others, nevertheless, he longed for the old thing to be gone, but it remained and at times seemed to gain strength. He fought to control it, but at the most inopportune times, and usually without warning, it would show its ugly head -often at the least provocation. Day after day, week after week, month after month, George waged a war against an enemy who was stronger than he was. He fought it, but often lost the fight.

As a Baptist, he never heard a message or a lesson that told him of a second work of grace that would cure this common problem. Sanctification was a word he heard, but it was explained as meaning growth in grace. Holiness too was given a different meaning than we understand, as merely "separation", so his church offered him no hope of

finding relief from the severe inner war.

How he hated that old nature that remained in him. Over the next few years he would struggle to control it, but the more he struggled the stronger the old man seemed to get. At times the war left him in despair. Over and over again, the battle was waged, sometimes won, but more often lost.

The defeats were made right, but the satisfaction he sought and the rest from that old thing seemed further and further away. He loved the Lord and longed to be the kind of Christian he could visualize in his mind, but the reality eluded him.

One day in 1974, he became so distraught by that out of control thing within him that his discouragement put him at what seemed to be the lowest point of his life. He got into his car and randomly drove down the road struggling with himself, with the Lord and with that old nature. He drove on and on until he found himself 125 miles from home at Pickwick Dam. Parking his car, he walked down below the dam to the water's edge and sat down on a rock. His heart that wanted to live in love for Christ and for everyone around, especially Clarisse, was almost broken. George had come to the end of himself.

As he sat there he watched the angry raging water coming from the dam. It seemed like a picture of the angry raging river in his own heart. He began desperately to pray and seek the Lord's face.

He told the Lord that he did not want that thing that was in him and wanted it gone; that he had fought it and it seemed -always lost the battle. The Lord was his only hope. Finally, he said, "Lord, I give myself to you." In his own words, "It was all I could do." He opened his eyes and looked at the river. The water had become quiet and calm, and so had his heart. There was a strange sense of rest and quietness. He sat for a while in the peaceful stillness that had come over him. Finally getting up, he walked to the car and drove home in a peace, and in a serenity he had never known before.

With his two hands gripping my arm, he said that for thirty years the out of control, explosive thing has been gone. He was still living in the profound supernatural quietness that came over him on the banks of the Tennessee River in 1974.

I felt like my heart would explode in praise. Here sat a Baptist man at my table gripping my arm and describing an experience for which he had no name, but which was up to date. He had no idea that a theology had been built around the rest he had received. He had no concept that thousands of people had shared the same experience. He could not grasp that the experience had a name because he had heard that name used to describe something else for years. But God had led him into an wonderful experience of entire sanctification without ever hearing holiness preached.

If you analyze his story, you will find every pre-condition for the holiness experience there: an old carnal nature that was out of control; a hunger for relief from that old nature; an entire consecration of himself to the Lord and a totally whole-hearted turning to the Lord in trust as the only source of relief.

As soon as these conditions are met, He will surely reach down and change your heart into a heart like His, in a moment of time. This is not growth, it is instant transformation!

My heart continues to be thrilled and filled to know that our matchless Lord will lead anyone into the experience of sanctification who will recognize their need and turn completely to Him. There is something special about this experience to my mind because of George's innocence. He was ignorant of the teaching we take for granted because we have heard it for years. What a river of sanctified joy comes to the heart of every Christian who will give themselves unreservedly to the Lord.

Today I wonder how many others who know nothing of the message of entire sanctification could give us a clear testimony to having had an unnamed experience, born in a crisis struggle with the old carnal nature, and fulfilled in a crisis meeting with Jesus who died without the camp to sanctify the people.

That is George Penderson's story as he told it to me, and it is one of the most remarkable and marvelous stories I have ever heard.

Here is one last lesson from this testimony to entire sanctification: theology and terminology are not requirements for receiving this glorious experience. Yes, they usually help, but the Lord will meet his children and cleanse their hungry hearts without theology or correct terminology.

Written by Gene Long

(Names have been changed)

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